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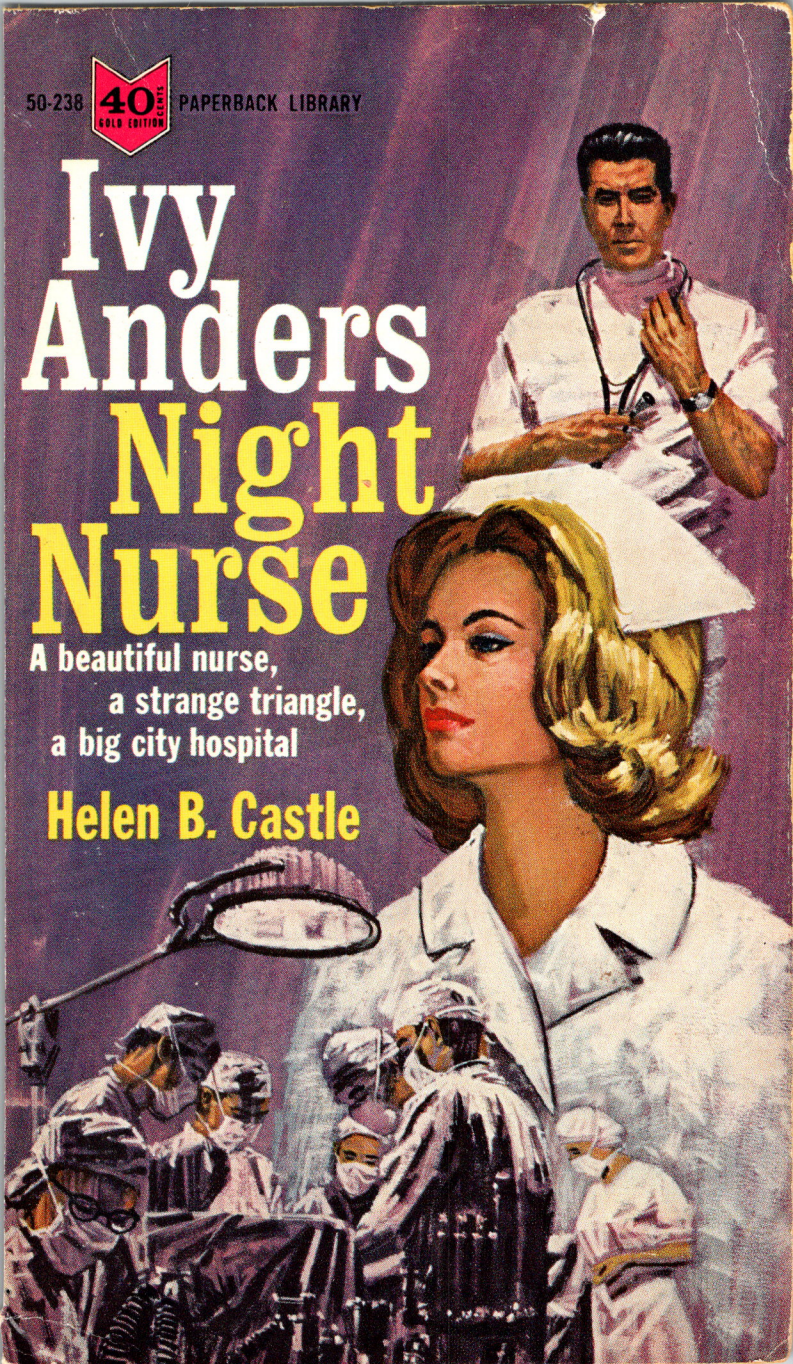
Ivy Anders Night Nurse

A beautiful nurse,
a strange triangle,
a big city hospital

Helen B. Castle



St. Vibiana's Hospital was unusually quiet that night. Too quiet, Ivy thought as she made her rounds. It was like the tense calm before a terrible catastrophe.

Then, suddenly, she heard footsteps behind her. But before she could turn around a large hand closed over her mouth and a man's voice whispered into her ear, "If you cry out, I'll kill you."

Ivy knew the moment she had feared so long had finally come. There was only one thing she could do to protect herself and the helpless patients on her ward. But if she failed, neither she nor they would live to tell the story. . . .

Ivy Anders, Night Nurse

Helen B. Castle

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I

Ivy Anders scurried up the long floodlit ramp at the front of St. Vibiana's Hospital. A brusque warm wind plucked at her white nylon uniform and tousled her short black hair. She ran through the entrance doors into the wide lobby, shadowy at this night hour, and then, hardly slackening speed, she veered left toward the elevators.

There was deep quiet on this floor—information area and records at the right, one drowsy clerk on duty, main waiting room at the left, a light burning there and several people visible, sitting in the tense manner of those awaiting the results of crises on the floors above. Beyond the waiting room was a long corridor corridor, lined by shops for gifts, flowers and the like, also a post office, the social service office and the ground floor coffee shop, all dark. Only the nursing office, a short distance away, showed lights.

An electric lobby clock indicated the time was twenty minutes past eleven. Ivy Anders darted into an elevator. "I'm late, Trude," she gasped. "Step on it!"

The operator showed an amused smile. "Only one speed for everybody in this thing, honey," she advised. And, "Boy, I'll bet Hoad is steaming!"

The same thought was in Ivy. Meriel Hoad, evening nurse on duty at Five West, distinctly did not like to be kept waiting for her successor when a shift changed. And Ivy Anders was, at the moment, exactly twenty minutes late in reporting for work.

Ivy shifted impatiently from one foot to the other. She felt warm, rumpled, and very much put out with herself. The elevator slid to a stop at the fifth floor, and she shot through the door as it opened, almost colliding with Sister Philomena, who, wraith-like in white summer habit, was waiting to go down. Ivy had to do a quick dance step around her. She gasped, "Excuse me, Sister!" and hurried on.

The aged nun showed a twinkling smile, a lift of a fragile hand. Then Ivy was around a corner and hurrying along a dim corridor toward an island of light in the distance, at the corridor's end, the nursing station for Five West.

Lotta Worth, who worked Five West also at night, was at the desk. So was Meriel Hoad, a tall blonde young woman, strikingly pretty, who showed a sultry frown. Ivy gasped,

"Gosh, Merry, I'm sorry! It was that darned old Chevvy of mine; I had to grind and grind on the starter for the longest time—!"

"Okay, okay!" Meriel Hoad said. "Let's get with it, for heaven's sake, so I can clear out of here!"

Lotta Worth showed Ivy Anders a faint, amused smile. Lotta was colored. Her uniform was light gray, her cap white but plain, with the letters L.V.N. stitched in red at one side. Unlike Ivy and Meriel Hoad, who were both R.N.'s—Registered Nurses—she was a Licensed Vocational Nurse and worked under Ivy's direction at night.

Meriel had the narcotics and sedations cabinet open, the check list in her hand. The familiar process of transferring responsibility began, with the inventory first of the drugs on hand, Meriel reading from the list, Ivy making the count.

"Morphine, grains a fourth, twenty. Grains a sixth, twelve," Meriel said.

"Check," Ivy said, counting the ampules.

"Demerol, hundreds, ten, fifties, twenty," Meriel said, shifting from a count in grains to a count in milligrams.

Codeine and Empirim came next. Then, after them, Nembutol, Phenobarbital, Seconal, Sodium Luminol, Chloral Hydrate, Tuinal, Doriden—the long list of items that were so beneficial to those pain-wracked in hospital beds, so dangerous if they fell into the wrong hands. This was a count which must be conducted with great care.

"All okay," Ivy said at last and closed the cabinet, locking it. She and Meriel both signed the check list.

Then the two of them bent together over the ward report.

Five West was something of a catch-all ward, medical and surgical cases combined. It held twenty-five beds, five in private rooms, the rest in two-bed rooms. Twenty-one beds were occupied tonight; there had been three discharges and four admittances since Ivy Anders had signed out this morning at seven-thirty.

Meriel rapidly summarized the four new cases: "501, coronary, oxygen going at four litres: 503, appendectomy, surgery at seven, he has been prepped; 510, a Mrs. Lally, eighty years old, fractured right hip, in Buck's extension and thank heaven she's been taking it quietly; 513, pneumonia, oxygen in room to be used p.r.n.—" if necessary "—four to six litres. His name is Mr. Siddons; he's a patient of a Dr. Farrow, who will look in on him—"

Ivy interrupted, "Farrow? I never heard of him"

Lotta Worth, who kept track of everything, murmured, "He's a new doctor, just accredited to St. Vib's."

Ivy checked the rest of the patients in her charge:

502, asthmatic, oxygen at bedside, to be used p.r.n.; 504, bed one, right inguinal hernia, second day post-operative, bed 2, bilateral inguinal hernia; 505, vacant; 506, cellulitis of the left foot, continuous warm compresses ordered—

"Every two hours?" she asked Meriel, about 506.

"He's restless," Meriel Hoad replied. "I've been renewing a little oftener."

507, appendectomy, first day post-op, with drain; 508, bed one, gastrectomy with levine tube to continuous low suction, bed two, vacant; 511, post-op cataract, both eyes bandaged, head to be maintained in level position; 512, bed one, stapedectomy, bed two, hysterectomy, first day post-op, on intake and output; 515, removal of lipoma, benign tumor of the right hip, second day post-op, ready to be up from bed, with help—

So it went, as Ivy quickly ran out the list, about the usual sort of night list for Five West, which got a little of everything with the exception of maternity and children's cases; they had their own floors.

"Okay," Ivy said at last. Then, "Oh, about Miss Cardwell, in 518—?"

"Nothing yet," Meriel replied. "The big domes down in Pathology are still conferring."

Alice Cardwell, twenty-eight, successful interior decorator, might have carcinoma of the breast. Ivy felt for her, deeply.

Meriel renewed her frown, glancing to her wrist-watch, glancing pointedly to the electric clock over the nursing station desk. "For Pete's sake do something about that car of yours!" she said, and left, going off along the corridor toward the elevators at a pace which swirled her uniform skirt about her long slim legs.

Lotta Worth chuckled softly. "Only one thing could upset her that much," she remarked. "Merry must be in love again."

"Whoosh!" Ivy said, blowing through pursed lips. She still hadn't quite caught her breath yet. Going to her locker, she opened it and examined herself in the mirror—somewhat squarish face, dark eyes, slightly hollowed-out cheeks, firm chin, firm mouth, firm nose; she wasn't pretty, Ivy told herself at times with resignation, but she surely had firmness—or looked it, at least, though there were times when she felt her face must be fibbing.

And above the face her mop of black hair, thick and silky-fine. Her father had once made a joke about her hair, her sooty eyes. "You're black Irish," he had said. "Some Hibernian must have gotten into the family a hundred years ago, and has cropped out again in you!"

She wasn't any kind of Irish—Welsh and English, rather, a long way back. She wasn't even Catholic, though this did not matter at St. Vibiana's. There was no discrimination here of any sort for either staff or patients.

Ivy took down her cap, with its black band indicating her R.N. status, and put it on, snugging it in place with a couple of bobby pins. "Do you know who has Meriel going around in circles this time?" she asked.

"Not yet," Lotta replied. "I suppose, though, that he writes M.D. after his name."

Ivy mentally agreed. Meriel's several most recent love affairs had been with medical men. Ivy at times envied her, even though Meriel's involvements uniformly seemed to end in explosive break-ups. At least Meriel knew the excitement of being in love. Ivy, with her twenty-sixth birthday just around the corner, had the feeling that that sort of thing was passing her by completely.

"She probably has a late date," Lotta continued. "It must have gotten to the serious stage fast, since she's so upset about making him wait a few extra minutes."

Ivy fussed a moment with her uniform. She straightened the seams of her white stockings, checked the gold maltese cross pinned high on her left side, above her breast, certifying she had graduated from the school of nursing at Mercy Hospital in San Francisco, and she also checked the name plate worn below it, reading: Miss Anders, R.N. She wiped a faint smudge of dust from her cheek, applied a touch of pale lipstick and closed her locker, turning back to the desk.

Lotta had a cup of coffee waiting, from the silex on an electric hot plate in a nearby storage closet. Ivy sipped gratefully. She had eaten a sketchy meal upon arising five hours ago, but had had nothing since.

"Merry forgot to tell you something," Lotta said. "Mrs. Jordan is off ill again tonight."

Ivy glanced along the corridor toward a distant glimmer of light approximately a city block distant on the far side of the hospital, the nursing station at Five East. Mrs. Amelia Jordan was head nurse at night for the whole floor, with her office yonder, and she had been absent a great deal lately. "Poor woman!" Ivy sighed. "It is recurrent malaria, hanging on ever since her time as a Navy nurse, and it seems to be getting worse. I'm afraid she may have to retire before long."

"Well, you've handled her work often enough, in addition to your own; maybe they'll give you her job, if that happens," Lotta murmured.

This was an exciting thought for a second. Then Ivy

laughed. "When did you ever see a head nurse without gray hair? I'm going to make first rounds, Lotta."

"Right," Lotta said, and moved to the chart table to begin her work there.

Ivy took a flashlight from a desk drawer and started eastward along the corridor, slanting back and forth across it from room to room. This was a quick preliminary round, to check on the patients, to make certain all tubes were functioning, all oxygen tanks full and operating, or ready to do so.

Some of the patients were asleep; some were still awake. She spoke, low-voiced, to those who stirred and murmured.

Mrs. Lally, white-haired and grandmotherly, she of the fractured hip, showed a strained smile. "I feel like such a fool, knew all about the danger of a fall, of course, at my age, but my foot just seemed to slip—"

"You'll be all right in no time," Ivy assured her. This was slightly mendacious; old bones had a tendency to knit poorly, but the report on her indicated the fracture was hair-line and straight, and she should be able to walk again. Ivy fluffed Mrs. Lally's pillows.

Aaron Rubin, a synagogue cantor, he of the right inguinal hernia, said apologetically, "I'm feeling some pain, nurse, told Miss Hoad about it and she said she would do something, but I suppose it must have slipped her mind, with so many other sick people here."

A number of things had slipped Meriel's mind lately. Ivy said, "If you still feel pain at midnight, Mr. Rubin, we'll do something about it."

The pneumonia patient, Mr. Siddons, was also feeling pain. Ivy made a check of his temperature and pulse. "I'll be back soon," she promised him.

Alice Cardwell, of the suspected carcinoma, looked up at her with haunted eyes. "I know they're going to say it's cancer, I've known it from the first," she said drearily. "Why don't they tell me and get it over with? This waiting is driving me mad!"

Ivy studied her with pity. The woman had discovered a tiny granular spot in her breast, with terror beginning, but she had put off from day to day, week to week, the doing of anything about it, hoping, by ignoring the spot, to make it go away. Instead it had grown.

Now she was here, facing the terrifying possibility that her breast might have to be removed. It could be worse than that, though, much worse. Metastasis could have begun, the spread of cancer cells along the blood stream to other parts of her body.

Ivy had wondered at times, with a sense of iciness, what she would do herself if she ever detected a lump in her own breast. She hoped she would have the courage to have it examined at once, without a second's delay. She had known too many who had not done that.

"Dear, there is a very good chance it is benign, not malignant," she told Alice Cardwell. "And where there is any delay in a report, it usually means the final verdict is good."

This was not entirely true. But the harried woman needed something to hold off the terrors clawing at her in this dark room.

"Well—" Alice Cardwell said, managing a tremulous smile. You do make me feel slightly better, Miss Anders. And if I could just have a little something so I can sleep—?"

Her doctor had indicated sedation, if needed. "At midnight," Ivy promised, and then returned to the nursing station. Now it was time to prepare and administer midnight medications.

She was glad the ward was quiet. Each night was different. There were times when an infectious restlessness, an uneasiness, kept her on the run all night.

Charlie Bell was idling about, talking to Lotta Worth, who was giving him short answers. Charlie Bell was night orderly for the fifth floor, colored also, a cheerful, gangling young fellow with a reputation as a Lothario. Lotta, married to a draftsman in a missile plant, was wary of his practiced charm.

"Emergency just admitted three kids, beat up in a gang fight on the Flats," Charlie informed Ivy. "Five East is getting two of them."

The Flats was the slum area which spread for a number of block around St. Vibiana's, like trash about the hem of a stately lady's gown.

Lotta said, "So you go down and get ready to move them up, Charlie. "We've got work to do here."

"I could do with a cup of coffee," Charlie said hopefully.

"The cafeteria on Three Main is still open," Lotta said.

Charlie Bell grimaced, but started away. Moving to the chart table, Ivy said, "Can't we spare him a cup, Lotta?"

"Coffee costs money, and he never pays his share," Lotta replied. "Charlie mooches other wards, but he isn't going to mooch here!"

She was double-lining the charts, indicating the beginning of a new day, using a red-ink pen. St. Vibiana's heeded the old hospital adage: "When the night begins, the red comes out." Lotta was neatly printing the new date, Thursday, August 21.

Ivy began reading charts, a swift eye-glance for each. At the same time, she was thinking ahead to medications, seda-

tions, drugs. Lotta, finishing her double-lining, moved to the desk and started arranging the medication tickets. These would be checked with care against doctors' orders.

Then Charlie Bell was coming back at a run along the dark corridor, eyes wide and white. "Fellow just cut himself bad, by the elevator!" he gasped. "He's spouting blood all over the floor!"

Ivy ran toward the elevators, both Charlie and Lotta close behind.

The elevators were in a sort of alcove, off the corridor, with a small waiting room for the floor at one side, closed off by glass doors. The man was standing by those doors, where a jagged hole showed in one of the panes. He was fairly big, heavy-set, attired in fawn slacks and a short-sleeved sport-shirt, open at the throat, was holding his left arm, thumb digging into the flesh; his expression was one of extreme annoyance.

"What kind of hospital are you running here?" he demanded of Ivy Anders as she stopped, facing him. "There is a slick spot on the floor, my foot slipped, I put out my hand to steady myself, and it rammed right through the glass."

A ragged gash about four inches long showed on the under side of his arm. There was blood on the arm, blood spotting his slacks, blood on the floor—a great deal of blood, it seemed to Ivy. There was also a sport jacket on the floor, at one side.

Ivy said, "I'm afraid the artery may be cut."

The man's thick dark brows lifted sardonically. "The thought has already occurred to me that the artery may be cut; it's why I'm digging in with this thumb," he said. "Just tell me where to go to get it patched up, and you can waltz back to whatever it is that you do—"

Ivy interrupted him, "Charlie, give me your necktie. Hurry!"

"Necktie?" the man said. "What—? Now, wait a minute—!"

He tried to draw away from her. But Ivy was winding the necktie about his arm, just above the elbow, pulling it tight and setting a knot. It made a fairly effective turniquet. The man said, "Confound it, there's no need for that!"

"Behave," she told him crisply. "You are in a patient status now, whether you like it or not. Lotta, run and call downstairs; ask for whoever is night surgery resident to come up here in a hurry. Charlie, you help me to get him to the treatment room."

Lotta started to turn away, but paused, clearing her throat. "Maybe I had better call the building patrol, too," she suggested. "This man has a gun."

Ivy had not noticed the gun before. She did now, a small gun in an inside the belt holster.

The man said testily, "That's right, I have a gun; I also have

a badge, since I'm a policeman, Detective Sergeant Dick Rudd, for the record. And I'm not going to any treatment room—"

Ivy started to turn him toward the corridor. "You had better lean on me. Your color isn't at all good."

He shook her off, impatiently. "Blast it, I don't need any woman to lean on—can make it under my own steam . . . and I'm going downstairs to find a doctor—!"

He took two steps away from Ivy, bent to pick up the jacket on the floor, then abruptly crumpled, sagging to both knees, almost falling on his face.

"Lend me a hand, Charlie!" Ivy said, crouching beside him. She gripped his arm, tugging. "We'll have to walk him along the hall."

He was quite heavy, but they managed it, lifting him, pulling him along. Sergeant Dick Rudd's feet were moving almost aimlessly, his head was down, chin on chest, and his features were becoming quite gray. Ivy got his right arm about her shoulders. She put her own right arm about his back.

"A cop," Charlie Bell muttered. "I sure hope he don't get the notion somebody pushed him through that door. I was right there when it happened!"

"You just help me hold him up," Ivy said. "I want him in the treatment room as fast as possible."

II

To Ivy Anders' great relief, the artery in Sergeant Dick Rudd's arm was not cut. She determined this for herself, several moments before the night surgery resident came striding into Five West's treatment room, a lean, saturnine-featured young man with a brush of short brown hair, saying, "What is all this? Arms are for cutting outside of the hospital, not on our wards!"

Dick Rudd was reclining on the treatment table, right arm raised to shield his eyes from the bright overhead lights. A swallow of spirits of ammonia in a glass of water had revived him somewhat, along with his irascibility. "Who are you?" he growled.

"The name is Stan Dikestra, and add an M.D. after it. I understand you're a cop. What were you doing up here at this hour, trying to arrest some poor patient because of a parking ticket?"

Rudd snorted. "Forget the wisecracks and get busy, will you?"

"Glad to oblige." Dr. Dikestra bent over him, examining his left arm. Ivy had washed it off, using warm water and alcohol, and had swabbed the gash with tincture of zephrin, a strong antiseptic.

She had seen this resident a number of times before, in passing, but there had been no previous contact with him—probably, she thought, because he had not been on at night. He was said to be rather good.

"Ugly cut," Dikestra commented. "You just missed slicing the radial artery. No bad muscle damage visible, but we'll see. Make a fist. Does that hurt?"

"Sure, it hurts. Look, patch me up and let me get out of here!"

"Okay, one patch job coming up," Dikestra said. He glanced to Ivy. "Plain thread, nurse. And pentothal, I think."

"Hey!" Rudd protested. "Doesn't pentothal knock you out? Use something else, then, a local. I don't intent to do any sleeping!"

"Correction, you are going to do some," Dikestra told him, "and the penthothal will get you off to a good start. Any spare beds on your ward, nurse?"

She nodded, yes. "And I'm overdue for medications, Doctor. Perhaps I should call for a float nurse to assist you—?"

"No. Let the medications ride. I'll cover for you with the chief nurse," Dikestra said. "I want you right here."

"Listen!" Rudd said. "I'm not staying in this place—!"

"Oh yes, you are," the resident said. "For two reasons. First, the hospital's lawyers won't like it if I let you walk out, since you might take it into your head to sue us—for neglect, among other things, if we don't put you to bed, with the best of care—"

Rudd snorted again. "Who ever heard of a cop suing anybody? I'll sign a release, taking the blame for what happened."

"Sign it tomorrow," Dikestra said. "The second reason is that I mean to check this arm in the morning—there is always the possibility of unexpected complications or infection—and I'm going to make sure you're on hand, so it can be done. But no pentothal—? Well, a taste of phenobarb later will put you to sleep, if it's needed. Stick two cc's of novocaine in him, nurse. Then we'll hemstitch."

Dick Rudd still grumbled, but became silent after a moment, interested in what they were doing, as Ivy prepared the hypo and made the injection, as Stan Dikestra deftly threaded a needle and set to work.

There was skill and surety in his hands. This was, of course, a fairly elementary chore for him; still, there were degrees of competence among doctors, and Ivy quickly recognized the fact that his reputation was not wrong. He was very good.

The job absorbed him. Finished, he stepped back, with a satisfied nod. "Rather neat, if I do say so," he remarked. "You can handle the dressing, nurse."

"It looks okay," Rudd conceded. "Thanks, Doc."

"My pleasure," Dikestra said.

He lighted a cigarette then, and held it to Rudd's lips. The sergeant grunted his thanks, taking a deep drag.

Ivy busied herself with gauze and adhesive, bandaging the arm. She wondered if Dikestra was noticing that she knew her job, also. "I'll check him at 505, Doctor," she said. "It's a private room."

"Good," Dikestra approved. He watched until she was finished, then said, "Now, you can get his clothes off and tuck him in."

Rudd started violently. "The devil she'll take my clothes off!"

Ivy had to smile; it seemed obvious Sergeant Dick Rudd had never spent any time in a hospital before. "It will be all right," she assured him, "not at all what you're thinking—"

"Never mind what I'm thinking! I can take my own clothes off!"

Dikestra yawned. "Call Charlie Bell," he said. "We'll let him tuck this hard-head in. Off the table, chum; I'll lend you a hand to your room myself. And no more complaints, please. There are a few sick people on the premises who need both me and the nurse; give a thought to them and let us get on with our work."

Dick Rudd showed a sudden contrite grin. When he smiled, Ivy noticed, his expression became quite nice. "I'm sorry if I've made any trouble," he said. "It's just that I've been so griped at myself for the damned foolishness of cutting my arm, then nearly blacking out. Can somebody call police headquarters to report I'm here and why, but that by golly I'll be back on duty tomorrow?"

"I'll handle it myself," Dikestra promised, "though with reservations about your being on duty tomorrow. Let's go beddy-bye, sport."

Lotta Worth had already started the medication table rolling along the hall, handling those medications she was allowed to administer; some where reserved to the responsibility of an

R.N. Ivy joined her, pushing the work in an effort to get it back on schedule.

They were finished by one, which was not too bad.

The pneumonia patient's pains had been eased with morphine, and the synagogue cantor had been given three-fourths of a grain of seconal—no more, for he wanted to be awake when Father Mardikian granted communion to Catholic patients at seven. "We talk a little; he has a fair command of Hebrew and it is quite pleasant," the gentle-eyed man confided to Ivy, who promised to help him awaken.

She checked Mrs. Lally with care; the old lady was asleep, but uneasy, and would require frequent visits through the night. And Ivy administered a grain of sodium luminol to Alice Cardwell, who was still awake and grappling with her fears.

Returning to the desk then, where Lotta was at work again on the charts, Ivy was surprised to see Dr. Dikestra standing there, cup of coffee in hand; he had put the usual nickel on the desk to pay for it, she noticed.

"I'm back," he informed her. "Five East wanted me. One of those kids from that gang fight couldn't make it; he just checked out."

"Oh!" Ivy breathed, feeling sorry for Five East's night nurse, whom she knew only slightly but they share one thing in common, hope that a patient would not die during their tour of duty. It happened, of course; life began in a hospital, life ended, but every death was a defeat, a shock, no matter how one attempted to be impersonal and detached.

"He was so young," Dikestra muttered, and she realized he had been affected by the death also. Then he went on, abruptly changing the subject, "I've seen you around, several times, with mental notes to say hello and get acquainted, but I never seem to have the time. What is your first name, Miss Anders?"

She told him. He said, "Ivy. I like that. You look as though your name out to be Ivy. It's nice to know you. I hope you think it's nice to know me. I hope you aren't prejudiced by rumors, perhaps, that what the cop said is true, that I'm just a wise-cracker, full of funny sayings."

"Well—" Ivy said. In her opinion it was never wise for a nurse to venture an opinion concerning a doctor.

Stan Dikestra said, "It is a rough, lonely business to stand over someone with steel in your hand, knowing you must try to play God, knowing how inadequate you really are but still it is up to you to hold Azrael at arm's length. That is the angel of death, if you don't happen to know. I make with the jokes

because I feel at times that I might crack wide open if I didn't."

"I know that feeling," Ivy said. Her way of trying to cope with it was to do the best she could and occasionally, in private to weep.

The resident smiled, as though pleased by her words. "It is nice to be with somebody who understands," he said. Then, "Be sure to have the lab run a hemoglobin test on the cop so we'll know how much blood he lost and whether he needs any."

Ivy said, "I have already written the order, and sent it down by Charlie Bell."

"Good. Sergeant Rudd is a pretty okay guy, you know; I talked a bit with him, in his room. He's tough, of course, has to be, I suppose, in his line of work, but his hard talk was mostly from fear. Rudd is left-handed, you see, and top pistol marksman in the police department. He was afraid of crippling damage to his arm, really afraid, trying to cover it up by saying to patch the gash and let him go. He wouldn't take pentothal because he wanted to be awake, to be sure his arm was handled right. And he confessed something, the thought of stopping a bullet doesn't bother him at all, but he has always had a fear of being cut."

Dr. Dykestra shook his head musingly. "We all have something to be afraid of, I suppose," he remarked.

Then he put his coffee cup down and left, with no further word, heading toward the elevators at a swift, silent pace, white jacket, trousers and shoes a pale diminishing blur in the corridor.

Lotta Worth, at the chart table, murmured presently, "He likes you, a lot."

Ivy sniffed. And Lotta Worth smiled. "Yes, he does," she persisted. "Also, I've heard he has only a few weeks left of his residency, then is going into private practice . . . I've started a chart on that Sergeant Rudd, pulse and temp normal."

Lotta had checked him while Ivy was busy elsewhere. Ivy said, "I think I'll take a quick look, to make sure he is all right."

She discovered he was still awake. Rudd's head turned toward the door as she entered. He grumbled. "This silly thing I've got on feels like half a floursack!"

Ivy, who had heard hospital nightgowns referred to in much less favorable terms, said, "Is your arm keeping you from sleeping?"

"No. I don't feel it, the novocaine hasn't work off yet. But I'll dose off all right; you don't need to give me anything—"

"That is for me to decide," Ivy told him firmly. "If you need something, you'll get it."

"Orders!" he snorted. "So this is what being in a hospital is like; somebody else can have it!"

"I gathered that you have never been a patient before."

"Never had a sick day except as a kid, measles and mumps, that sort of thing, and then my mother did the doctoring. We were too poor to afford a hospital."

"How did you happen to be here tonight?" Ivy wondered.

"Yeah, that," Rudd said, with a wry chuckle. "Well, I have a brother-in-law who had a cyst removed from his back. He was on Five East; I stopped by after checking off duty tonight, and talked a nun downstairs into letting me come up, even thought it was late. Then I found out he went home yesterday afternoon! How about that? He checks out, I cut my arm while leaving, and wind up here!"

Ivy decided everything was in order in 505. "You must try to sleep," she said.

"A cigarette might help. There is a package in my jacket—"

"No smoking for patients at this hour," Ivy told him.

"But—!"

"No smoking," she repeated firmly.

"You're a hard woman, Anders," Dick Rudd grumbled.

Maybe he was right. But a ward was run according to the rules and regulations, when she was on it. Ivy left him. The time was nearing for rounds again.

There was a small open balcony beyond the nursing station. At three-thirty, the night's deadest time, Ivy stepped out there for a breather and a cigarette of her own. Surprisingly, everything was momentarily caught up. Even Lotta, the charts in order, was idly buffing her nails. Theoretically, each of them was allowed a half-hour off, away from the ward, during each shift, but seldom found it possible to take this time.

Ivy looked out over the vast dark city, listening to the sound, like a distant ebb and flow of surf, which seemed to rise from it. She was still standing there when the doctor mentioned by Meriel Hoad appeared, coming along the corridor.

He was carrying his bag, though even without it Ivy would have recognized what he was. After having known so many doctors she could spot one instinctively, at almost any distance.

She stepped inside, meeting him at the chart table. He said, "Good morning, nurse, I am Dr. Farrow. I am making some late calls and would like to look in on Mr. Siddons—"

The pneumonia patient; Dr. Farrow read the chart, frowning, pinching his lower lip, a thin-faced man of medium

height, with light blue eyes and sensitive features. He wore a small brown mustache. With Ivy, he went into Mr. Siddons' room and made a brief check there. Then they returned to the nursing station. "He seems to be doing quite well," Farrow commented. "Do you think I might have a cup of the delicious coffee I smell—?"

Ivy was pouring for him when a red light suddenly stuttered outside of 501, the nearest room, and also on the signal board near the nursing station desk. Then the light faded as Ivy hurried to investigate.

It was a heart patient, a Mr. Jacob Muller, aged fifty-two, admitted today following coronary thrombosis, and only one glance was needed to tell Ivy a deadly clot had probably formed in his bloodstream again and had reached his heart. His features were ashen, becoming cyanotic, and he was gasping for breath while struggling feebly against the pain that was tearing at him.

Ivy rushed back to the desk. "Lotta, call for his doctor to get here at once! Meanwhile, we'll have to do what we can—"

She prepared two hypos, moving at practiced speed. Lotta quietly spoke into the phone, then collected stethoscope and blood pressure gear—a sphygmomanometer. Hurrying to 501 with her, Ivy made the injections, one-quarter of a grain of morphine to ease the pain and allow him to breathe, and adrenalin to stimulate his heart.

Lotta was across the bed from her. Ivy used the stethoscope to check his heart-beat. It was a faint, faltering murmur —and, as she listened, it faded to silence.

She said, "Raise him, Lotta!"

The L.V.N. gripped his shoulders, pulling the man, his head lolling to one side, into a sitting position. Ivy clenched her right fist. She slugged him in the chest, over the heart, and again, as hard as she could.

It was no time for half-measures. Seconds were ticking past, counted by Ivy Anders in her head. The patient's heart had to be started again, if at all possible, before about three minutes had passed; that was about the length of time the brain could remain without blood and oxygen, fed from the heart. Even if the heart might be started again, past three minutes, there was danger the patient would have become a vegetable, an imbecile, to live perhaps but never again to know anything.

Ivy checked with the stethoscope. She heard nothing.

Then a hand touched her arm. It was Dr. Farrow, who had followed her into the room. He murmured, "Let me try."

The physician slugged Jacob Muller's chest also, the pounding of his fist making a dull thud of sound in the room. The other patient here was stirring uneasily, though he was not yet awake.

Dr. Farrow reached for the stethoscope and listened, nodded and returned the instrument. "You have a beat," he said.

Ivy heard it, hesitant but becoming regular, gaining in strength, and continuing. She nodded to Lotta, who lowered the patient. He was breathing anew, slightly more easily, and his color was a little better. Perhaps prompt action had saved him, to live a while longer; perhaps the deadly clot was dissolving harmlessly.

Ivy Anders had never been confronted with a situation of this sort before, but she had known what to do and had made the right moves. She remembered, with a sense of awe, what Dr. Stan Dikestra had said about playing God.

Dr. Farrow was backing away. "I hope you two will forget I was here," he said.

Ivy nodded quickly, and so did Lotta. A fine point of medical ethics was involved, since this was not Dr. Farrow's patient. He had acted quickly because it had seemed he must, and while it did not appear very likely that he would be censured if his involvement became known, it was better on the whole to pretend he had not been in the room.

"Take his pressure, Lotta," Ivy directed, continuing to check the beat of Jacob Muller's heart. "And keep on taking it."

An hour later, when Ivy returned to the nursing station, she was surprised to find Dr. Farrow there.

He said, smiling, "I had to wait and learn how your patient is making out."

Jacob Muller was still alive. His own doctor was with him now. He had arrived in a somewhat dishevelled state to listen to Ivy's report of what had been done and to state he could not think of any other action which might have been taken. "You never know, with a coronary, when there may be another attack. All we can do is try to cope if it comes. I'll tell him he has you to thank for still being with us, nurse."

Ivy said, to Dr. Farrow, "The thanks are due you, not me."

The physician smiled. "If any credit is due we'll share it, as our secret—though I think you would have managed to pull him out of it and I only managed to speed that by a second or so."

He yawned, smiled again, apologetically, and suddenly took Ivy's hand, pressing it, before leaving.

She looked after him for a moment, oddly stirred by that brief contact. Then Ivy shook herself. Gray dawn light was beginning to seep into the hospital and there was much to be done, with everything behind schedule again, final rounds to be made, the night's final charting to be completed, with patients to be aroused and baths started, at a little past six, so the Catholic patients would be ready for communion when Father Mardikian appeared.

It was abruptly past seven, the day nurses were arriving, and there was the work again of transferring responsibility.

Lotta said, "Thank God not many nights are like this one has been!"

Ivy nodded in agreement.

She had looked in on Sergeant Ben Rudd, to find him still sleeping, and had decided not to awaken him. A heavy lock of dark hair was over his forehead; Ivy had reached impulsively to smoothe it back and he had stirred, muttering. She had jerked her hand away, cheeks unaccountably warm.

Lotta, who tried to be home in time to have breakfast with her husband, was gone by seven-thirty. Ivy went down to the main floor coffee shop a little later. She had breakfast, feeling rather worn. For eight hours she had been almost constantly on her feet, on the move. This was what it meant to be a nurse, seven or eight miles of walking each night.

Dr. Stan Dikestra entered the coffee shop and Ivy smiled, nodding to him. But he did not seem to see her, passed by, where she sat at the counter, and went to join two other residents at a corner table.

Darn it, Ivy thought, the night could have ended better than that. But, she told hersef, forget it; tonight would soon be here; it was time to go home and get some sleep.

III

Her alarm clock sounded its peremptory summons, near eight in the evening several days later, and Ivy Anders scrambled out of bed, pulling away the black velvet sleep mask which shielded her eyes.

In her nightgown, she went to the kitchen and sat on a step-stool there, toes curling against linoleum. For some min-

utes, in the summer day's late twilight, she devoted herself to dispelling the fog of sleep, her slimness and tousled black hair reflected in a nearby window. There was a dry, washed-out, empty feeling in Ivy Anders, and a sense of fatigue that always came toward the end of her work week.

She shook herself presently, slid off the stool, put a teakettle on, twisted a knob of her small electric range, and went into the bathroom for a quick shower.

Her apartment was two miles from the hospital, one flight up, bedroom, living room, kitchen and bath. Ivy had had three apartments-mates since starting to work at St. Vibiana's, losing two of them to matrimony and breaking up with the third after a candid agreement that they got on each other's nerves. She had lived alone for three months.

"I like being alone," Ivy said, turning on the hot water.

"Who are you kidding?" her alter ego inquired.

"Whom," Ivy corrected.

"Okay, whom?" her other self agreed. "You may say you like it, but you start talking to yourself, as now. You need company, girl."

"Sure. Some other woman, the two of us bumping into each other at every turn, twice as much laundry hanging in the bathroom, squabbling politely over whose turn it is to

"Listen," her alter ego said, "anything is better than this silent, empty apartment. And I'll bring up another point—you need somebody to help pay the rent."

Touché, Ivy thought. This was the most compelling reason why she had better start looking for another apartment-mate. Her take-home pay could barely cover what it cost her to live alone.

"I'll thing about it," she conceded.

clean house and take out the trash—not to speak of the holy horror when one of us has the blues."

"Think about something else," her other self advised. "What you really need isn't another woman to share things. You need a husband."

"Oh, shut up!" Ivy said, turned on the cold water, yelped, then scrambled out of the tub and toweled herself.

She stepped on the bathroom scale for a moment. Her weight remained fairly steady at around a hundred and eighteen pounds. Was she perhaps a little too thin, standing as she did nearly five feet six in her bare feet? Dr. Ivan Fodor, the frail, white-haired, benign chief of the medical staff at St. Vib's, thought she was too thin. "Eat bananas, my dear, lots of bananas," he had advised her, "and drink

double-thick malteds. You can add some additional pounds in no time."

But the trouble with additional pounds was that they always seemed to go to the wrong places. She wasn't very hippy yet and had no great need for a girdle, though she wore one anyway. "No bananas," Ivy decided firmly, "and no double-malteds!"

She examined herself briefly in the bathroom mirror. Darn it, Ivy thought, she might not be a raving beauty but she didn't think she was a goon either, and it seemed to her she looked almost overwhelmingly female, from just about any angle.

Still, there was no man in her life . . .

Getting into bra and panties and a light dressing gown, she went to pick up several letters under the slot in her door, took them to the kitchen, made a bacon and tomato sandwich, toasted, plus instant coffee, then glanced through the letters while eating

One was an alumni bulletin from the school of nursing at Mercy Hospital in San Francisco. Ten members of her class, Ivy noticed, were now married.

There was an excited letter from one of her ex-apartment mates, announcing that she was pregnant.

A note from her sister Benita, in Long Beach, invited her to dinner on her next free night off. Benita, married and the mother of two noisy young sons, was constantly trying to play matchmaker for Ivy, and had a new prospect for her to meet.

"Confound it," Ivy said crossly, "everywhere you turn this evening, you keep running into men and love!"

She tried determinedly to focus on something else—the hospital, and what had happened recently on Ward Five West.

Mr. Siddons was still there, making a slow recovery in his bout with pneumonia, and Dr. Paul Farrow had stopped in twice again, past midnight, to check on his patient and also to drink coffee with Ivy Anders. He had rather shyly confided his first name to her.

Jacob Muller had been discharged to the care of a daughter; he had profusely thanked her. "I will never forget you, Miss —never!"

Mrs. Lally had been transferred to a nursing home for the slow mending of her broken hip. She had promised to remember Ivy, also. "I do hope we will meet again, my dear. Perhaps you can visit me some time, when I am well again, and meet some of my grandchildren."

Alice Cardwell had greeted her, on the night following the

night of emergencies, eyes shining with great relief. "You were right; I have only a benign tumor," she had said. "They'll cut it out, and I'll be all right again!"

Miss Cardwell was now two days post-op, soon to be sent home. She was also emotional in her gratitude to Ivy. "We must get together when I am on my feet again," she had said. "I want you to meet my fiancé; he had heard me talk so interminably about you, and of course he can't be here at night when you are on duty."

Ivy had agreed it would be quite nice, though she rather doubted such a date would take place. Few patients actually remembered a nurse for very long after leaving the hospital. For that matter, Ivy did not remember them very long, either. With so many patients coming and going she had to concentrate too hard on the ones who were always on hand to keep in mind for any length of time those who had preceeded them.

Alice Cardwell had also said, "I can't understand why you're still single. I mean—so many male patients here, and they must simply adore you—"

This comment had made Ivy smile wryly. One of the myths about hospitals concerned the handsome, wealthy men a nurse had a chance to meet, and snare, with her tender ministrations. None of that sort had ever come Ivy's way. She doubted that one ever would. Anyway, night duty kept her much too busy to dally with romance on the ward. Also, hospital care was too expensive for any patient to be in her charge long enough for romance even to get started—not yet, at least.

Thinking of patients reminded her of Sergeant Ben Rudd. He had left the hospital on the morning after his accident. Ivy had been asked to fill out a report concerning the mishap, and had done so. This seemed to end the matter as far as she was concerned.

She had not seen Dr. Stan Dikestra again, either. His interest in her, if there had been any, seemed to have evaporated very quickly.

Ivy determinedly ate several spoonfuls of cottage cheese, for protein energy, and finished her coffee. She went into the living room, turned on her small TV set but it seemed to clatter emptily and she switched it off again.

It was dark outside now, the time of evening, she thought, when other girls would be going out on dates. She had not had a date, other than those arranged by Benita, for quite a while. Men were not greatly interested in a girl who had to be home early so she could hurry to work.

"So who needs dates?" she thought. "It's a pretty tiresome routine, really, the whole business of working at being vivacious, companionable, and terribly interested in the details of some man's job, when he is usually thinking only of setting up an opportunity to neck, a poor word to describe what he actually has in mind. Who needs that sort of thing? Forget it!"

"You're kidding yourself again," her alter ego said.

Perhaps she ought to take lessons from Meriel Hoad, Ivy thought. There, now, was a girl who had mastered the secret of having men in pursuit of her.

This morning, leaving the hospital at half-past eight, Ivy had seen a nurse hurry along the street ahead of her, ducking quickly around a corner but not quickly enough; Ivy had recognized her as Meriel. And what Meriel could have been doing at St. Vib's at that hour was beyond Ivy's power to guess.

Correction, she told herself, she could think of a possible reason, one which made her feel a little cold, not that it was any of her business or ever would be.

"Forget that, too," she admonished herself, "and get busy."

She had to do her hair, iron a slip and uniform, put liquid polish on her white duty shoes and finish dressing, then undertake the struggle of getting her car started; it needed a new battery and repairs on the starter, but those things would have to wait until several more pay-days.

The thought of the never-relenting strain on her pay-check depressed Ivy for a moment. But then she remembered that she would be off tomorrow, and the day after, and she began to sing, hurrying the small chores of getting herself ready for the night ahead.

Meriel was in a sunny-tempered mood, and for a good reason. Ivy was reporting in twenty minutes early, even after having some trouble with her car, which had quit just as she was turning in at the parking lot across the street. But the parking attendant had lifted the hood and jiggled something, and it had started again. The lot was supposed to be reserved for doctors; however, the attendant pretended not to notice when she drove in, and Ivy made a careful point of giving him a box of good cigars every now and then.

Meriel rattled through the change of duty items in a hurry She said, as Ivy checked doctors' orders for midnight medications, "Hurry it up, will you?"

Ivy said, "You must have another date tonight."

"Umm!" Meriel responded, and then giggled. "You can say that again, something real special, too!"

The ward count was down tonight, only fifteen patients. There were mysterious ebb and flood tides in a hospital. Maternity always filled up fast at the time of a full moon, of course, when some strange compulsion demanded that women have their babies, but why did the count run high for the whole hospital one week, only to dwindle the following week? Ivy often wondered, but no one had an answer for her.

She asked, while still checking medication orders, "What in the world do you do on a date that starts so late?"

"Oh, there are lots of things to do!" Meriel said.

She did a dance step, humming, and lighted a cigarette. This was a breach of regulations, for smoking was forbidden at the nursing station. Then Meriel was stepping on the cigarette in a hurry; Mrs. Jordan, the night head nurse on the fifth floor, was coming along the corridor, and accompanying her was Sister Antonia, night supervisor of the whole hospital. Sister Antonia was a large woman, apple-cheeked, brusque, forceful, and everybody, including Ivy Anders, felt somewhat in awe of her.

Sister Antonia said, "Sister Philomena has had to check in again, Miss Anders. We have assigned her to 505. I will have a brief word with her, if you don't mind."

Sister Philomena, Ivy's favorite among the nuns, had been operated on six months ago for a tumor of the knee. The operation had not been very successful. She was quite old, having celebrated her golden anniversary as a nun last June.

Sister Antonia went off to 505, the full skirt of her white habit sweeping the floor. Ivy noticed that Meriel was waiting, standing on her discarded cigarette.

Mrs. Jordan was waiting also. She seemed wan and tired. Ivy murmured, "I hope you're feeling better."

"I'm living on atabrine," the head nurse sighed. "Maybe I'll pull out of it. Thanks for keeping things going while I was away."

Sister Antonia came back. "She is resting comfortably. Mrs. Jordan, shall we go along to Five East?"

They started away together. Sister Antonia added, without pausing or looking at Meriel, "Miss Hoad, I must note on your record that you have been smoking again—and must warn that you are nearing the danger point in the matter of ignoring hospital regulations."

Meriel glared after her. Then she laughed, with a defiant toss of her head. "There are other hospitals; I'm just liable

to quit this place and its cheesey rules!" she said. "Anders, take over!"

She left, tempestuously. Lotta, checking the charts, murmured, "I don't think she means half of what she says, but that half might land her in a lot of trouble one of these days."

"Have you heard yet what man she is involved with this time?" Ivy asked.

"Well, seems I did hear mention of a fellow named Boothby, down in the business office," Lotta replied.

Perhaps Meriel's propensity for falling in love with M.D.'s had been side-tracked, then. Ivy knew Conrad Boothby, to the extent that she had to deal with him twice a month. He was a big, smooth-mannered, handsome man. And—could he have been the reason for Meriel's presence at St. Vibiana's yesterday morning—?

It was still none of her business, Ivy thought as she began to make her first rounds.

An hour later she discovered Meriel had made a mistake on the evening shift, one that could have resulted disastrously.

Lotta called her attention to it, "Does this look right to you—?"

It was a standard order, in Meriel's hurried scribbling, with a notation it had been taken by phone from a doctor at ten o'clock.

The case was a laminectomy, surgery for correction of a crushed spinal disc, first day post-op. Ivy read what Meriel had written, something overlooked by herself in the distraction of Sister Antonia's visit, though she felt certain she would have caught it before actually following the procedures indicated. It seemed to be an obvious mistake—but who had made it?

Coincidently, the doctor who had called the order in was Paul Farrow. Ivy reached instantly for the desk phone and told the downstairs board operator to find him.

A woman came on the line first. Sounding tired and distraught, she introduced herself as Dr. Farrow's wife. "He is sleeping, has been working so many late hours recently," Mrs. Farrow said. "And, really, these calls at night—"

"This is an emergency," Ivy said firmly.

She waited, and heard voices presently, raised as though the two were quarreling. Then Dr. Farrow came on the line. He sounded half-asleep, tired also, and irritable. "Yes, Miss Anders?"

She said, "About your laminectomy, Doctor, a Mr. Heintz. I am checking an order you phoned in earlier—one hundred

and fifty milligrams of Demerol, p.r.n. at midnight, to be repeated in an hour—"

"Good God, no!" Dr. Farrow exclaimed, abruptly very wide awake. "I ordered one hundred milligrams for each dosage! Don't you know that three hundred in an hour's time would quite likely put him into shock? But you must know that!"

Of course, she knew—and it was something of which Meriel should have been well aware, also.

"Who wrote the order as one hundred and fifty?" Dr. Farrow demanded.

"Perhaps it was misunderstood on the phone," Ivy said. "That happens occasionally. I will make the correction, Doctor."

It was obvious to Ivy that Meriel had made the mistake. If Ivy Anders had administered the dosage as written, however, the law would have held her responsible, no matter who had made it.

Dr. Farrow said, "An evening nurse took my call. Who was she?"

Meriel could have been rushed, very busy, at the time the call came in, Ivy told herself; she could have written the dosage incorrectly without realizing what she was doing—Or, more likely, she had scribbled it heedlessly without thinking about what she was doing, her mind on something else. If it were to be reported, though, the mistake might be regarded as serious enough to result in Meriel's dismissal from the hospital, since she was in trouble already—and this could be very damaging to her professionally. "I am correcting your order, Doctor," Ivy said.

He was silent for a long moment. Then, "Very well," Dr. Paul Farrow said. "I am somewhat to blame, perhaps; I may not have given the order clearly enough. Since no damage has been done, I will accept your action—for the time being, at least."

He hung up. Ivy realized now with a slight sinking feeling that she might have risked her own professional standing for Meriel's sake.

She noticed that Lotta, nearby, was showing a faint frown. Ivy said, somewhat crossly, "All right, let's wind this up by hearing what you have to say about it!"

"Why, I was only wondering whether I would cover for her, too, if I was in your place," Lotta replied. Then she laughed. "I probably would!"

Feeling a little better, Ivy said, "Let's get medications started."

It was a quiet night. At seven o'clock, washing her hands, she decided that such a shift made night duty quite tolerable. And Ivy suddenly wondered how often she washed her hands in the course of each night. Several dozen times, probably; this, also, was what it meant to be a nurse, hot water and soap, very vigorously applied.

She had breakfast at the coffee shop and left the hospital at eight-thirty, to glimpse Meriel Hoad again on the street. This morning Meriel glanced back, saw her but did not pause, hurrying on.

Ivy tried not to think of the reason why Meriel might be here at this early hour. Then she put Meriel out of her thoughts, concentrating on herself, on two days off, now beginning, and what she was to do with them.

One day could be devoted to house-cleaning, a visit to a beauty shop, and marketing, but what about the other one? This was becoming a weekly problem, days off and nothing she could think of wanting to do. Perhaps she would accept Benita's invitation and drive down to Long Beach, there to meet the new man her sister had hopefully found for her—

A car slid to a halt in the street, forcing her to stop, a plain black sedan with a police radio muttering in it and Sergeant Dick Rudd at the wheel, smiling and saying, "Hi!"

"Why, hello," Ivy responded. "How is your arm, Sergeant?"

"Fine, thanks to you and Dikestra," he said, opening the car door and getting out. "Look, you have tomorrow off and so do I. How about joining me for a picnic, just the two of us, at Fern Canyon?"

Ivy started in astonishment. "How in the world could you possibly know that I have Tuesday off?"

"I've found out quite a bit about you, all quite nice and quite interesting," Dick Rudd replied. "You would be surprised at how much information people reveal if you let them know you're a cop."

Ivy's immediate reaction was anger at this candid disclosure he had been checking up on her.

He wore a gray linen suit today, with a white shirt, a plain dark tie, well-polished shoes. He did not look at all like a cop, Ivy thought, but then she noticed a faint hardness at the corners of his eyes, a faint tightness of his mouth. As with doctors, his profession had put its marks on him.

Did she want to become involved with such a man? Ivy did not know. But she certainly did not like him showing his badge and asking questions about her.

"Fern Canyon is the coolest spot in the city at this time of

year," he said. "And it won't be crowded on a week day. I'll furnish the food, plates, cups, everything. There is a delicatessen on the east side, over around Brooklyn Avenue, which has the best potato salad and corned beef you ever tasted; they'll take care of everything for me. How about it—?"

Ivy almost said no, definitely and frostily. Never mind that such a date might be quite pleasant, after so long without one, that it would fill a day which otherwise loomed emptily before her. His manner was entirely too assured, she thought, as though he was certain she could not possibly turn him down; also, it still rankled that he had checked up on her.

Then he smiled again, pleadingly, and for a second seemed rather boyish. "All I did was ask a few questions at the hospital personnel office—where you're very well thought of, incidentally," Dick Rudd said. "And I've been sitting at the curb here for an hour, watching that ramp and waiting for you to come out, rehearsing over and over again how I would ask you. Please don't turn me down, Ivy!"

Dick Rudd did not seem at all assured now. He only wanted a date with her, she told herself, wanted it very much, and could any woman fail to be touched and flattered by his confession of the effort he had expended to set that date up? She couldn't, at least.

"All right," Ivy agreed. "What time shall I be ready?"

"Eleven o'clock should be about right," he decided.

"Well— I live on Dolores Street. But I supose you know that."

He grinned. "I know," Dick Rudd said. "I made a dry run, my place to yours, yesterday evening. I'll pick you up at eleven tomorrow morning."

IV

There was a grassy bank and a noisy little stream which brawled along a rocky bed—an artificial stream, running down from a city reservoir, but this did not detract from its charm. Several live-oaks were scattered about. A profusion of the large, lacy ferns which gave the canyon its name clustered along the creek bank.

Some picnic tables were nearby, but Dick Rudd, spreading a blanket on the grass, remarked, "A picnic is for sitting on the ground, even if there are ants around."

The canyon was tucked away in a corner of a big city

park. As Dick had promised, few people were about this week day. There was an illusion of having the place to themselves.

Ivy wore plain white capris, sandals and a blouse, with a red ribbon about her hair. Sitting down and crossing her legs, tailor fashion, she looked on as Dick brought a big wicker basket from the car he had driven here—a compact, and his own, not the official car he had been driving yesterday. He also carried two thermos jugs, one of coffee, the other of water. Kneeling on the blanket, he removed the basket's cover and began to unpack its contents.

Ivy said, "Let me do that, a little later."

"Okay," he agreed, and came to sit down beside her.

The sky was cloudless, a deep, eye-searing blue. It was very warm in the city today, but quite cool here. Ivy felt far removed in time and space from the stresses and strains of St. Vibiana's. She tried to remember the last previous time when there had been such a sense of contentment, of eased nerves in herself, and could not.

A cottontail peered out inquisitively at them from among the ferns. Dick Rudd flipped a pebble, and the small rabbit scurried away. He said, "Ivy, how did you happen to become a nurse?"

The question came as something of a surprise. And she decided that she wanted to think about her answer, to discover if possible why he had asked. Ivy countered, "How did you happen to become a cop?"

There was no hesitancy in his reply; perhaps this was something he had rehearsed, also. He had always wanted to be a cop, Dick Rudd told her. While still in high school he had frequently gone to the Police Academy in Chavez Ravine where rookies were trained, watching until he had a considerable amount of familiarity with the course, itching for the time to come when he would be preparing there for a career.

"I went to Belmont High, downtown," Dick confided, "then had two years of junior college. By then I was twenty-one, eligible for the police exams, and felt I had had enough of school. Not that you can ever have too much book learning in police work, and I've been taking extension courses for years, law, criminology, science and government, all I could cram in. But I wanted in the department, and I made it."

That could not have been more than about a dozen years ago, Ivy thought. Dick Rudd could not be much past thirty.

He flipped another pebble at the ferns; the cottontail, which had crept back, scurried away again. Dick continued to tell Ivy about himself, how he lived alone in an apartment on

the north side, close to the Highland Park division headquarters, to which he was presently assigned. His sister was his only near kin, and she would soon be moving to Georgia. Dick's brother-in-law was being transferred there.

Dick had never married.

He liked baseball, bowling, and had a secret fondness for symphony concerts, though there had not been much opportunity lately to indulge in any of these likings; Ivy gathered that Dick worked a good deal of extra time on his own.

He was diffidently proud of his marksmanship with a pistol. "Not that it actually means an awful lot as far as my standing in the department is concerned; a cop who relies too much on his gun isn't a good cop, and promotion depends on other things. But I always wanted to be the best there is in some one thing . . ."

He fell silent.

It seemed obvious Dick felt he was a good cop, and took a great deal of pride in this, in the fact he had worked hard to get where he was and felt he had honestly earned his status.

Ivy studied him. He wore tan slacks and a short-sleeved sport shirt, with a pad of bandage small and neat on his left forearm, where dark hair curled like fine silk threads. His hands were big, strong-looking, with blunt-tipped fingers. There was an aura about him of vigor, forcefulness, of cleanliness and hard masculinity.

Just what was he leading up to, Ivy wondered, with all of his talk?

Then she scolded herself for being naïve. A sense of growing excitement was beginning in her, like air bubbles dancing in her veins.

Uncoiling her legs, then hugging her knees, Ivy said, "I suppose I always wanted to be a nurse, too."

This was over-simplifying it, though. As with Dick Rudd, who had been drawn to the Police Academy, there had been a motivating factor for Ivy Anders, a family cousin who was a doctor in the small northern California town where she had grown up.

She had been allowed to help out in his office, a gangly teenager gaining her first taste of health care. After high school he had suggested the nursing course at Mercy Hospital in San Francisco, where he had interned, a good school and a tough course, but she had been capped number three in a class of twenty-five. Forty-four had started the three year grind; the others had washed out. Ivy had never been in any danger of doing that. Shes had liked nursing from the

start, the ever-changing patterns which made each day, each case, different from all those that had gone before.

Ivy now felt herself well-seasoned in her profession, good at her job also and as proud of this as Dick Rudd was of his standing as a policeman. She let pride color her words slightly, something she had never done before with anyone—but then, never before had all that she was and hoped still to be been brought into such sharp focus as during this pleasant noontime in Fern Canyon, with a man listening to her words.

Dick said presently, "But why night duty—?"

Ivy discovered she had never tried to put into proper perspective her reasons for working at night.

There was extra pay, of coures, though it was not considerable, only ten per cent above the day scale, and the additional money certainly did not make up for the inconveniences of night work.

Then Ivy found she could put her finger on the one reason which more than anything else kept her on the midnight to dawn shift: Responsibility. There were fewer nurses on duty during those hours, and each was to a large extent on her own—even more so in Ivy's case with Mrs. Jordan off so much. She had functioned frequently as a head nurse, making her own decisions, running Five West as seemed best to Ivy Anders, the care of many patients in her hands and hers alone.

She thought that she had managed to do this pretty well.

"Hmm!" Dick Rudd said, glancing toward some youngsters who had appeared and were playing with a football nearby.

It was hard to tell what his reaction was to her words. Ivy nibbled at a blade of grass, wondering if she had confided too much, thinking of the old saw that men were interested in pretty, decorative women, not those who displayed some intelligence and ambition.

Dick suddenly stood up. "I think I'll go fool around with those kids for a couple of minutes, if you don't mind."

"All right," Ivy agreed. "I'll get lunch ready."

She knelt on the grass and unpacked the basket, scolding herself for probably having assumed too much too soon and for having talked too much. Perhaps Dick Rudd had only wanted companionship for this picnic today, nothing more, and whatever interest he might have had in her could have been blunted by her garrulousness.

Perhaps he was only self-opinionated and had wanted a sounding-board for his brags about his status as a cop. But Ivy bit her lip at this thought; she knew instinctively it was not true.

Dick was throwing the football, with the kids running furiously to catch it. He apparently had an eye on her, though, for he came back when everything was ready, breathing a little hard and grinning. "I like being around kids," he confided.

Ivy said, "You brought an awful lot of food!"

"My gang at the squad room will make short work of it tonight, if any is left over," Dick said.

It seemed to Ivy that she ate an enormous amount, sitting on the grassy bank, the coolness persisting though the sun was now very hot and high above them—more than she had eaten at any meal in quite a while, little sandwiches with intriguing fillings, deviled eggs, cheese-stuffed celery, tangy pickles; there was even a cocoanut cake, slightly squashed.

They talked again, Ivy watching her words with some care, and it seemed to her Dick was being guarded in his manner also—talk of light, inconsequential things, and somehow what had begun as a very pleasant interlude was losing its savor.

After a bit, Dick stretched out on his back, hands clasped under his head. "Too many double shifts behind me the last couple of weeks; I'm beginning to feel a little dopey," he remarked, yawning.

"Go ahead and nap," Ivy said. "I'll clean things up."

His eyes closed. She packed the basket again, and there was a considerable amount of food left, she disposed of crumbs and paper, then sat down with her back against a trunk of one of the live-oaks.

Dick Rudd was breathing evenly, silently. Ivy studied him, the pleasantness of his features in relaxation, but she noticed how determination and self-will showed in them still, strongly.

He was a man of strength, she thought, one who would stand as a fortress against the world for the woman of his choice—and should she make the effort to tantalize and intrigue him? Should she attempt to bring Dick Rudd to the point of asking that she let him take on that task in her behalf?

Ivy snorted inwardly, with a wry confession that she wouldn't even know how to begin such subtle maneuvering. Anyway, Dick's waning interest in her and the way the day had somehow gone flat made it seem certain her hopeful assumption of a little while ago that today might mark an exciting beginning with this man had been all wrong.

The incident would probably end, Ivy told herself, with polite thanks from him for the date, an indefinite statement

that they might get together again sometime . . . and after that, nothing.

She suddenly felt tired, too tired to fret about it. She had not slept much last night. Her days off always upset things a little for her. Her thoughts wandered, became dim; then she started, coming awake with realization she had dozed for some time. There were deep shadows in Fern Canyon and the sun was well beyond it.

Dick's head had turned, and the heavy lock of dark hair had fallen across his forehead. He still appeared to be asleep. Ivy went to kneel beside him. She reached out and smoothed the lock back.

His eyes opened. He grinned. "This is the second time you've done that. I like it."

Ivy jerked her hand away. She felt a stinging in her cheeks. with realization he had not been asleep on the morning in the hospital, either. Rising, she went to stand and look at the creek.

Dick said, "I want to apologize for something, Ivy."

"Apologize—?"

"Yes. I nerved myself up to say something to you, a while ago, then got cold feet and couldn't, and went off to play with those kids. I'm going to say it now, though, no matter what happens."

He came to stand beside her. Ivy noticed distractedly there was a vapor trail in the sky, made by an invisible jet. She noticed the hard line of Dick Rudd's jaw, but also a faint, momentary quiver in his cheek.

He spoke again, the words coming rapidly, "I am asking you to marry me, Ivy, as soon as possible. I haven't been able to think of anything else since we first met, it's what I want more than I have ever wanted anything, and I hope you feel the same way—"

The reaction in Ivy Anders was immediately one of unbelieving astonishment, a startled, dazed sense that she could not be hearing him right, especially in view of all that had preceded this moment, the feeling his slight interest in her had virtually evaporated. She broke in, "Dick, please! You can't say such things, not now. You don't know me; I don't know you—"

"Ivy, you're wrong," Dick said. "It is my business to size up people in a hurry, to see them for what they really are, and I don't make mistakes about that. I do know you, that you're good, and nice, also smart, with a will of your own, maybe a little hot-headed; I'm inclined to be hot-headed, too, we'll probably do some fighting at times, and I wouldn't have

it any other way. I need somebody to curb me down every now and then, thump my skull if that is necessary, and it will be. As for what there is to know about me—"

He paused for a second, looking away. "I'm tough on the job, because I have to be, but I'll never be tough with you," Dick continued. "You won't ever have to worry about other women. I've known some, of course, but you are the first I've asked to marry me. I always had a feeling I should hold out until the very best came along . . . and act quick, when she did."

Ivy realized the details of all this would be indelibly imprinted in her memory from now on—Dick, and his eyes again on her, pleadingly, a touch of rising mist from the creek, the pleasant green odor of the ferns, the shadows in which they stood together, and the low, intense sound of his voice going on again:

"I've saved something every month, and have a couple of thousand in the bank. I'll never be rich, but my take-home pay isn't bad and it is going to be better. I have been among the first three on the list for promotion to lieutenant for the past two years, and some vacancies are coming up soon that must be filled. I'll be making deputy chief before I'm through, because I know what I want and how to get there. I may even wind up in the top job, chief of the whole department!"

She felt no doubt that he probably would do very well. But at the same time his self-analysis, the revelation of his dreams and ambitions, was unsettling. "Dick, please don't say any more," she begged. "And I—I don't know what to say in reply to you."

"I didn't expect you to say anything today. I know you'll need some time to think about it. Will you do that, Ivy?"

For a second she felt a wild impulse to give him another sort of answer. Somehow, the time and the place seemed to demand it, a romantic setting, the two of them standing here alone; Ivy thought of herself in future years, confiding to some friend then, "Dick proposed to me on our very first date—and I accepted!"

He was all male, he had strength, and she felt strongly drawn to him. As for getting to know Dick Rudd, Ivy remembered a thought offered by her sister Benita on one occasion, "You tell yourself you know a man, marry him, then discover he isn't quite the person you thought he was, at all. I guess it's the same in his case, too."

If this was true, why bother to wait—?

But Ivy said, "Yes, Dick, I'll think about it."

He showed his sudden boyish grin. "Thank God that's off

my chest! And if I failed to mention it—I probably did, but won't after this—I love you, Ivy, very much."

Then his hands were on her arms, he was gently turning her to face him; his head was bending. He was kissing her.

Ivy responded. It was, on the whole, quite a nice kiss, she decided, even if she felt no particular tingling and heard no bells ring. This had never happened to her. She had never quite believed it really happened to anybody.

But if love was an inner disturbance, a sense of desire mingled with doubt, a sense of tightness all through her body, then she was at least partially in love with Dick Rudd already, for she felt all of these.

He grinned again, hands still on her arms. "It's going to work out fine, Ivy, I know it is! I have nearly two weeks of accumulated leave; we can fly to Hawaii, I've always wanted to go there on a honeymoon. You'll be quitting your job, of course."

Ivy started. "Quitting—?"

"Yes. You won't be doing any more nursing. My wife isn't going to work!"

In his exuberance, it seemed probable that Dick had stated this more forcefully than he had intended. Ivy tried to tell herself as much, but anger began to flare in her nevertheless as she responded with equal force, "Give up my career, let my training and experience go—is that what you are saying—?"

"Career? But you didn't take it on as a lifetime job—?"

She had never seriously considered this question before, since it had never come up. "Suppose somebody demanded that you stop being a cop?" she said.

His brow ridged. "I don't understand what you're getting at. It isn't the same thing, at all."

"Oh, isn't it? I suppose there is a great difference, simply because you're a man—?"

"Yes, damn it, there is! A man's duty is to make a living, a woman's duty is to make a home, and to—to take care of the kids. If that sounds corny, okay; I'm not settling for anything else! Good God, you must have given thought to such things. Don't you want to get married and have children? I do."

Ivy had not devoted much thought to this, either; it had been something too indefinitely far into her future for her to give it serious consideration.

And her anger was still rising over what seemed Dick Rudd's casual assumption she would quit her job, quit nursing, only because of his decree that of course she must. "Never

mind what I might have been thinking! Listen, I spent three hard years learning how to be a nurse—more than you spent learning how to be a cop, I'll bet—and I've had nearly five years of hard work since. If you think I'm going to discard all of that—! Well, I'm not, for you or anybody else!"

"You will!" Dick Rudd said.

They were almost shouting, standing face to face, their bodies nearly touching. His hands dug into her arms.

"You're hurting me," Ivy said.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, letting her go and taking a backward step. Both of them had said angry, bruising things, she thought, and for her part Ivy was sorry—though, hurriedly reviewing her words, she knew that, if she had it all to do over again, she could not phrase them any differently. As for Dick, his expression indicated he had no intention of recalling anything he had said.

"It is growing late," Ivy told him. "I think you had better take me home."

"Very well," he agreed stiffly, turning and going to pick up the blanket, the basket and the thermos jugs from the grass.

Sitting on her side of the compact as Dick Rudd made the quick run back to her apartment house, Ivy felt her heart flutter and had a momentary sense of near-panic. Love won, love lost, in the course of a single day—did she want it this way, when he might possibly be drawn to her again?

But, confound it, she wasn't going to give in to him! She liked nursing, was proud of her profession and meant to go farther in it, much farther; she was not going to throw it all over simply because this man high-handedly demanded that she do so!

Getting out of his car, she said formally, "It was a very nice picnic, Dick. Thank you for inviting me."

"I enjoyed it, too," he said, tone also wooden. "Perhaps we can do it again sometime."

Sometime? Never, she thought; Dick Rudd would want nothing more to do with this hard-headed woman who had opposed him. He was accustomed to giving orders and having them obeyed, his work had conditioned him to this. He needed someone softer than she was, or ever could be.

Ivy went upstairs, took off her clothes and had a shower, then flung herself down, still damp, on her bed.

"Did I do wrong?" she whispered, suddenly feeling terribly alone, feeling shaken by the whole experience. "Should I have tried to wheedle him along, tried to find some way to make him change his mind—?"

Her alter ego seemed to whisper, dimly, "Honey, this is

one time when I don't have any answer for you, none at all."

Ivy Anders wept, then. And if this was foolish and didn't help things a bit, she thought, so be it. She was a woman, lonelier than she had ever been, and utterly wretched. It was her right to cry, and she did, until the pillow was damp with her tears.

V

On Wednesday night when Ivy returned to duty, relieving Meriel Hoad on Five West, Meriel said, "You must have been wondering what I was doing at the hospital last Monday morning. Well, I had to come and see somebody in the business office. They have been figuring my income tax withholding all wrong."

Ivy strongly suspected this was not the truth, and it did not explain the other morning when she had also been at the hospital—but Ivy reminded herself again it was none of her business. She brought up the matter of the error in the Demerol dosage, and Meriel made a fretful reply, "So I made a mistake! It's a wonder there aren't more of them, doctors calling in and mumbling orders over the phone!"

"But three hundred milligrams in an hour—!"

"All right, I fouled up the whole deal!" Meriel exclaimed. "It could happen to anybody. And stop nagging at me about it!"

Ivy decided to let the matter go, even though Meriel had made several other mistakes recently that she might have mentioned—heedlessly, it seemed, her mind on something else, her love affair presumably. If she continued to make them—But this must be something for the other nurse to worry about, Ivy told herself. She now had troubles of her own.

Lotta Worth was off. No one showed to take her place. Ivy called the nursing office, which replied apologetically that no one was available There was not a spare R.N., L.V.N. or aide in the hospital tonight. The staff count was drastically low. Later in the year this situation would ease as nurses migrated westward from other parts of the country to spend the winter. They were not licensed in California, of course, but were allowed to work on a temporary basis because of the nursing shortage.

Maybe she should join the ranks of those migrants, Ivy thought—leave next spring and find a job elsewhere, as far

as she could get from the bruising memories of the picnic in Fern Canyon. There were always pages of ads in the nursing journals, placed by hospitals all over the United States and Canada, begging for applicants.

Or perhaps she should join one of the services. There had been a letter from the Air Force recently, offering her officer's rank and assignment to any area overseas she wished.

She had heard nothing more from Dick Rudd.

The nursing office sent up two student nurses to help out. They had completed their first year of instruction in St. Vibiana's school and were very eager but also nervous and uncertain, for this was their first tour of actual ward duty.

She could not do much with this pair, Ivy thought, other than to assign them various small chores to keep them busy, and she would have to handle rounds, medications and charting herself. Thank heaven the ward count was still down, only sixteen patients tonight.

Watching their faces as she issued her orders, Ivy remembered herself as she had been at the same time, full of ideals, determinedly ambitious for a career. Well, she had that; she was on her way. Was the career worth what it was demanding of her? Ivy did not know.

If love meant being miserable, longing almost intolerably for the touch of a man's hand, the sound of his voice, then she was in love with Dick Rudd. And why had fate dealt her a man who was so inflexible in his attitude, who could not see that marriage and a career were not necessarily incompatible?

Ivy set to work. She called first on Sister Philomena, still in 505, features waxen, hair short and snowy; Ivy fussed over her and Sister Philomena said, with her singularly sweet smile, "Don't bother about me, child. I shall be up and about again in a day or so."

Perhaps she would be, at that. Sister Philomena had made other recoveries from the debilitating after-effects of her operation.

The nun continued, "I feel humbly proud my affliction is the same as that which it was decreed that dear St. Bernadette of Lourdes must bear. I use her as my model in accepting and overcoming it."

This made Ivy's problems seem rather petty. She returned to the nursing station, feeling better, and was surprised to find Meriel waiting there, though the time was nearing midnight.

"I wanted to say—well, thanks for covering for me, on the goof I made about the Demerol," the blonde nurse told her

awkwardly. "I've got enough against me already without that going on my record, too."

"Forget it," Ivy said.

"You don't know how things can get you all tangled and twisted up inside until you don't realize what you are doing!" Meriel went on. "It isn't going to happen again, though. I mean that! Look, I'll help you with the medications. I don't feel much like going home yet."

"Thanks, a lot," Ivy said. "But it's quiet tonight. I can manage."

Meriel went off, uncertainly. Then Mrs. Jordan came to check on the ward, with word that Five East was short-handed, also. "We'll have to get through the night as best we can, I suppose," she sighed, "with our fingers crossed and praying that no emergencies crop up!"

The head nurse seemed even more worn than when Ivy had seen her last. But, like Sister Philomena, she was bearing her affliction with fortitude.

Medications were handled quickly enough; the student nurses were more helpful than Ivy had anticipated. She was at the nursing station again, at one, working on charts, when Dr. Farrow appeared.

He had no patient on the ward tonight but had stopped by, Farrow explained smilingly, to check on something. "I'm still a little curious about the error in the Demerol dosage the other night—thought at first it might be a case of tit for tat, you keeping silent about my intrusion in another doctor's coronary case if I said nothing more about my order being incorrectly recorded—"

"Oh, no!" Ivy said.

Dr. Farrow nodded. "I apologize for my misconception—had just had some words with my wife, at the time; she had not wanted to awaken me, and our quarrel distorted my thinking. I realized almost immediately that I was being unjust to you, that you must be only trying to cover for the evening nurse who took my call. I have also decided it will be best to forget the whole matter, since no harm was done. Agreed?"

"Very well, Doctor," Ivy said.

"Could I have a cup of your coffee?" he asked. "It is quite good, you know."

It wasn't, not tonight, since Lotta was not here to make a fresh pot. And he did no more than sip briefly, after Ivy poured for him, then rolled the cup between his hands, continuing to talk.

Ivy kept on with her work, half-listening, feeling the intentness of his gaze on her.

"—and Harriet simply can't seem to understand the many demands on my time," he was saying presently. "I am afraid she is never going to adjust to being a doctor's wife."

It was his own wife he was talking about, Ivy realized, with a faint edge of anger and bitterness in his voice.

"That is something they don't teach in medical school, but they ought to—what to do about a wife who can't or won't make allowances for all a doctor must do for his patients," Paul Farrow said. "It can put enough pressure on a man to break him—"

One of the student nurses came hurrying breathlessly to the desk. "There's a light on at 519, Miss Anders!"

"I see it," Ivy said, rising. "If you will pardon me, Doctor—?"

"Of course," he said. "And I have taken up far too much of your time. I must be leaving."

He went off along the corridor, long-striding. Ivy hurried to 519, another pneumonia case—it was odd how they came in at this time of year, with summer still lingering—needing nothing more than a soothing, the touch of her hand to a fevered brow, assurance that someone was on hand to keep vigilant watch.

Another light, then, and a somewhat more serious case, a gall bladder post-op, a woman of fifty, with the possibility of peritonitis developing; Ivy was still working over this patient when another call came for her, "Telephone, Miss Anders!"

It was the M.A.R.—the main floor admitting room—with word of another gang fight on the Flats, and two emergency cases for St. Vibiana's. One of them, she was informed, was a girl, and both were being assigned to Five West. "They are on the way up. You'll get the boy first."

This had the sound of Mrs. Jordan's prayer not being answered, Ivy thought resignedly. "Get back to that gall bladder case and stay with her," she instructed one of the students. And, to the other, "You stay here; watch the lights and the phone."

Ivy then went along the corridor to the elevators.

The pane of glass in the waiting room door, broken by Dick Rudd, had been replaced. Every time she passed it, Ivy supposed, she would be reminded of him.

The elevator, with Trude, the night operator, at the controls, arrived at the fifth floor. Charlie Bell appeared, pushing a stretcher cart which held the patient, a still, dark-featured young man who could not have been more than nineteen—tousled black hair, closed eyes, features showing a grayish cast, his breathing shallow and labored.

Dr. Stan Dikestra was walking alongside the stretcher cart, holding aloft a plasma bottle. "Roll it slow and smooth, Charlie!" he instructed.

Ivy said, "Room 507, Doctor," and she went ahead to open the door.

The three of them made a careful transfer of the patient from stretcher cart to bed, and Ivy set the bottle on a holder.

"It's going to be touch and go with this lad," Dikestra commented. "He was not only carved up good but also worked over with what seems to have been a length of iron chain. The girl got off easier, no cuts, just a beating. Charlie, you can go and bring her up, now."

"Mighty feisty girl," Charlie Bell muttered. "If she gives me any of her lip, the way she was doing it to those down in A.R., I'm liable to tell her what for."

He rolled his cart away. Ivy took the surgical ticket to the desk and made notation of the admission time. The patient's name was Sebastian Cruz, multiple knife slashes, including one of the abdomen, multiple lacerations, possible concussion, possible skull fracture. In a year's time more than a hundred like him would be received at the city's various hospitals, youngsters of a minority group, lashing out rebelliously against a world oppressing them but seeming to hurt only themselves in the senseless little wars fought in a jungle of their own making.

Prognosis, uncertain; Ivy wearily hoped he would not die on her shift. She checked the ward chart for a bed to receive the girl, and went back to the elevators again. When Charlie Bell reappeared, "Take her to 515," she directed.

"Hey!" the patient exclaimed. "Everything is just like on TV!"

She had a round face, full lips, a full body under her covering sheet, and wickedly knowledgable eyes. Her beehive mass of hair held an inexpert brassy tint. A livid purple-yellow bruise spread across her right cheek, with the eye swelling shut.

The name on the admission ticket was Jill Mowbray. Her age was given as eighteen.

"I don't belong here, though," the girl went on. "I'm okay; give me back my clothes, and I'll blow!"

"Be quiet, please," Ivy told her. "There are patients sleeping on this ward. You are being held for observation. It isn't for me to say when you can leave."

The police would probably want to question her, though such questioning never seemed to be very fruitful.

Ivy had switched on a bedside lamp. She dismissed Charlie

Bell, summoned the student at the nursing station and together they put the girl to bed. Ivy sent the student back, then glanced again to the information passed along from A.R. covering Jill Mowbray—multiple contusions, though no open lacerations. She had been x-rayed for possible fractures. No sedation had been administered; possibly Stan Dikestra wanted another look at her before deciding about that.

No next of kin was indicated. "Don't you have any family to be notified?" Ivy asked.

"Like I told them downstairs, I've got a stepfather," Jill Mowbray replied indifferently. "Maybe you can find him in some gutter. That's where he usually is. You'd be wasting your time, though. He don't give a damn about me. It's exactly the way I feel about him, too."

And, "Hey, how is Sibby Cruz doing? He'll make it; they could cut Sibby's guts out and he'd come back fighting."

A note of perverse pride was in her voice; then she continued, "We'll both get back at those cruts who jumped us tonight. It'll take a lot more than they can dish out to stop Sibby and me!"

She would be here for a while; she would be returned to the streets, Ivy thought, and apparently nothing could be done about that.

Ivy brought out her thermometer and shook it. "Open your mouth. Put this under your tongue."

But the girl, giggling suddenly, shook her head. "Whistle for the cutie pie doc who was downstairs, and I'll do it for him," she said. "He was nice to me. Like, real nice!"

She threw aside the sheet covering her and pulled up her hospital nightgown. "Hey, take a look. I've got a real classy shape, huh? He sure thought so!"

There was jeering wantonness in the gesture, in the girl's complacent preening of herself. And it was a slur on Stan Dikestra, who had examined her; this was part of his job, but with an R.N. standing by. He would never conduct such an examination alone.

Ivy pulled the nightgown down and replaced the sheet. "Behave yourself," she ordered.

The girl giggled again. "What's the matter, honey, did I upset you?"

Ivy snorted. After all she had seen in hospital work it would take much more than this to upset her. She put the thermometer in Jill Mowbray's mouth. In the moment of revelation she had noticed the numerous ugly bruises on the girl's body. They would be black and blue tomorrow.

And she was beginning to feel pain. Tossing her head with

sudden fretfulness, she mumbled, "I know your kind, I ought to, you've been shoving me around as long as I can remember —teachers, social workers, all kinds of do-gooders, with ice water where your blood ought to be—"

Ivy checked the thermoeter. There was a degree of fever.

Jill Mowbray glared up at her. "I'll bet you don't even know what it means to be a woman. Well, I do! I'm Sibby's woman, all the way. When we get together, it's thunder and lightning, we really blow up a storm! Like, there's no tomorrow, and what's the use waiting—?"

Ivy left her.

Charlie Bell and Stan Dikestra were both at the nursing station. Ivy said, "Doctor, do you wish sedation for the Mowbray girl?"

"Wasn't it administered downstairs? Well, we're shorthanded there tonight, too," Dikestra sighed. "Yes, a hundred of Demerol."

"Trash," Charlie Bell muttered. "That's what those two are, just useless trash. Seems a waste of time, trying to fix them up."

"Ah, no," Stan Dikestra said. "Trash, perhaps. But—useless? Father Mardikian says we are all alike in the eyes of God. While I'm not a Catholic, not much of anything, I suppose, I buy that. Even those two must be serving some purpose. We aren't wasting our time."

He was a man full of odd thoughts, Ivy told herself as she prepared the Demerol for injection.

Charlie Bell pulled at his lower lip. "I guess so, Doc," he agreed. "But I don't see why we've got to have such-like at St. Vib's. Seems the County General ought to handle them, and at the jail ward there; I'll bet the cops have got enough to put both of them behind bars!"

"Maybe you're right," Stan Dikestra said. "But we're stuck with them, for the time being anyway. They walked in on us, downstairs. It seems they were jumped only a couple of blocks from here, but managed to get away. And give the girl some credit, she helped the Cruz boy to make it, stumbling along, holding that stomach cut closed with his hands. Maybe they'll wind up at the County General jail ward, but not tonight. And not tomorrow either, at least as far as Cruz is concerned; he is in no shape to be moved. I'm not sure yet he'll even recover."

Ivy went to administer the hypo. Jill Mowbray, now in a haze of pain, hardly noticed.

Stan Dikestra was still at the desk, but alone, when she returned. He was talking on the phone. Hanging up, he said,

"A little more emergency work has come in for me, a couple of people mauled in an auto accident. I must get downstairs for a while. We'll give whole blood to Cruz as soon as he has taken the plasma. He should be typed by then."

"Yes, Doctor," Ivy said.

Glancing to his watch, Dikestra continued, "The unit of plasma will be in him by about three. Flush the tubing with normal saline. Follow with a thousand cc's of five per cent glucose and water. He can use it. The boy is close to being in shock."

"Yes, Doctor," Ivy said again, wondering why he was being so specific about what was a fairly standard procedure. And she had the wry reflection that she was sure to be behind in all of her regular duties tonight, with the demands of special care for Sebastian Cruz.

Dikestra grinned suddenly. "I have put it all in writing—heard some faint whispers about a doctor's orders that went haywire hereabouts recently!" he said.

Every wall in St. Vibiana's must have a pair of eagerly listening ears, Ivy thought resignedly.

"Watch him and let me know if I'm needed," Dikestra concluded. Then he yawned. "This night seems about a week long already!"

He left. Ivy picked up the student at the desk again and went to 507, where she made her first check on Sebastian Cruz. His pulse was feeble, his respiration shallow and labored, his forehead clammy and hot to the touch. Fever was beginning.

"Sit right here," Ivy told the student. "Watch to see that the plasma drip is steady. Keep your finger on his pulse and let me know instantly if there is any change."

She began charts on Cruz and Jill Mowbray, then made two o'clock rounds. The ward was asleep and quiet, thank heaven. Her other student was still with the gall bladder post-op.

She had checked Cruz several more times and was working hard on charting when the phone rang at a quarter of three. It was Stan Dikestra. "I'm still busy down here, but have a momentarily idle intern who can help out if you need him," he said.

"I don't think so, Doctor," Ivy replied. "The patient is still very weak but there has been no perceptible change. I should be starting the saline in about twenty minutes."

"Good. Cruz turned out to be O Positive, so we have plenty of blood on hand for him. I'll be up as soon as I'm free."

Ivy began her three o'clock rounds, checking Cruz first,

then taking the other rooms in their usual order. She was coming out of Sister Philomena's room when a flare of light at the mid-point in the long corridor caught her attention. It remained steady. Frowning, Ivy went to investigate.

The light came from an open elevator, halted at the fifth floor. Trude was standing there, looking very frightened. Three others were with her, two wolfish-looking young men, dark hair long and oily, wearing jackets and jeans, and a girl who wore a jacket also, plus a short skirt; her legs were bare and her hair was piled up in an intricate mass like the hair of Jill Mowbray, dyed a sullen shade of red.

They turned as Ivy approached, and one of the young men took a step toward her.

"We know Sibby Cruz is here and came to pay a call on him," he said, "but this elevator dame claims she don't know where Sibby is stashed. You take us to him, babe. Just do it nice and quiet, and nobody gets hurt."

"Except maybe Sibby!" the girl in the short skirt giggled.

Trude gasped, "I didn't want to bring them up, Miss Anders. They made me do it!"

Ivy heard herself say, "You people have no right at all to be here. Go back downstairs and leave the building, at once!"

The words seemed to come spontaneously, without thought on her part. Oddly, she did not have any feeling of being frightened.

"You hadn't ought to talk that way, babe," the young man said.

"Stop calling me babe!" she snapped.

"People get hurt when they talk to us that way," the other continued. "Like this, they get hurt—"

His right hand lifted. Ivy saw the glint of naked steel, reflected from the elevator lights. He was holding a knife. It had a long thin blade.

"You catch on?" the wolfish-looking young man said purringly. "Now, there isn't any reason for you to wind up hurt. Just take us to Sibby. That crut has caused us a lot of trouble, see, and we mean to see that he don't cause any more. Just take us to wherever you've got him—"

A hand touched Ivy's arm, pushing gently, forcing her to one side. Stan Dikestra went past Ivy and stopped, shielding her from the one who had made the threat.

"Don't try to use that knife, boy," Stan Dikestra said. "If you do, I'm going to have to break your arm."

VI

All of them stood frozen for a long moment, in the puddle of light from the elevator, and now Ivy did feel frightened, but for Stan Dikestra, not for herself.

He was standing lightly balanced, hands down at his sides and slightly out from them, with the fingers a little curled—a surgeon's hands, not those of a fighter. Still, he seemed completely confident.

The one who faced him, he who held the knife, showed a sudden flickering of doubt in muddy eyes. And the other slick-haired youth muttered uneasily, "Hey, we didn't figure on running into anything like this—!"

"Shut up!" the knife-wielder snapped.

But he continued to hesitate. Then Dikestra spoke again, "You were told to get out of here. Do it! Now!"

Trude gasped, "I won't take them down!"

"I guess that would be asking too much," Dikestra agreed. He pointed toward and beyond the fifth floor waiting room. "The stairs are over there. Use them!"

The snap in his voice impressed Ivy. It obviously impressed those three also. The girl stirred first, starting to cross the foyer toward the waiting room, scrap of skirt swirling about her legs. The knife-wielder looked after her uncertainly. Then the other youth was on the move also, following the girl.

The one with the knife shifted his feet. He muttered, in surly anger, "We'll be back!" And he went after them. Ivy noticed a word, 'Toros,' on his back, painted in bold red against black leather.

All three abruptly were running, the sounds of their hurried footfalls coming from the stair-well.

Stan Dikestra said, "Whew!" And, "Trude, get down to the lobby now. Inform the building patrol at once. With a dozen ways in and out of the hospital it isn't likely those three can be headed off, but at least something may be done to keep them from returning."

Trude nodded shakily. The door of her elevator slid shut and it dropped down the shaft, leaving Ivy and the resident standing in the now dimly lighted foyer.

Ivy said, "I was so scared for you!"

He laughed wryly. "I was plenty scared for myself, afraid I would have to back up my tough talk!"

"Where in the world did you come from?" she asked.

He had arrived on the floor about ten minutes previously, Dikestra replied, and had gone at once to check on Cruz. Leaving the patient's room to find Ivy, he had heard the sounds of voices from the foyer and had come to investigate.

"This night is two weeks long now," he concluded. Then he touched Ivy's arm again. "Well, let's forget it. We have some work to do, can't oblige those punks by having Cruz check out."

It was nine o'clock before Ivy trudged wearily to the parking lot without stopping for breakfast.

She and Stan Dikestra had worked for more than an hour over Sebastian Cruz. The youth was resting fairly easily now. It seemed he might make it. "And specials are indicated for him, which I'll recommend in my report to Mother Superior," Stan Dikestra had commented, referring to Mother Mary Gabriel, executive head of the hospital, "though I doubt if they can be provided."

Ivy doubted this also. A special duty nurse for each shift would cost sixty dollars a day. It seemed Cruz would probably be a charity case, and the hospital budget simply could not stand providing specials for him. His care would fall as an added burden on the regular staff of nurses, including Ivy herself.

"He should be moved to County General," Dikestra had continued, "but in my judgment he simply can't stand the ambulance ride across town—not today, not for a number of days to come."

There had been police on the ward at four o'clock, summoned by the building patrol. Ivy had told the little she knew to a young patrolman in uniform.

"Those punks never tried such a thing before," he had remarked. "There are two gangs, the Toros and the Knights, fighting each other for control of the Flats. Cruz must be somebody of importance in the Knights, since the attempt was made to get at him. It isn't likely anything will be learned from him or from his girl friend, though they'll be questioned later. And we'll try to find the three you saw, especially the one with the knife, but they will probably make themselves scarce for a while."

Toros, Ivy knew, was the Spanish word for bulls, a name probably chosen to indicate bravery, though it had not required much of that to threaten her with a knife. But she let it go; it seemed the incident was closed.

She got in her car and turned the key. Nothing happened Not a sound came from the car.

This, added to the rigors of the night just past, seemed too much to take. For a moment Ivy felt an almost overwhelming impulse to give way to tears.

The lot attendant was not in sight, nor anyone else who might help, even assuming there was anything much that could be done, which she doubted. Then Stan Dikestra, wearing a rather shapeless winter-weight blue suit, came along and stopped to peer at her. "Trouble?"

Ivy nodded resignedly.

"Well, I would offer to do something," he said, "but I never managed to find time for learning what goes on under a car's hood."

"I know what is wrong," Ivy said. "I've been putting off doing something about it. Now I suppose I have no choice."

"That is the way of life. It lowers the boom, and you have to take it."

She was in no mood for philosophy. "I must leave it here for a while, I suppose, and ride a bus."

"There is no need for that," Dikestra said. "I was about to take a ride in my clunker, to ease a few tangled nerves. I'll be glad to drive you home."

Her first impulse was to decline his offer. Ivy was out of sorts with Stan Dikestra. He had left the floor at around five-thirty in his abrupt manner, not bothering to say good night, with no indication he shared Ivy's feeling that the incident by the elevator, the struggle to keep Sebastian Cruz alive, might have brought them somewhat closer together than an impersonal professional relationship.

However, the thought of walking three blocks and waiting for a bus, in the day's fierce rising heat, made her decide not to be foolish. "Thanks," Ivy said. "That is very kind of you."

His car was a clunker, all right, in a sad state of dilapidation, but its motor came clatteringly alive, and Ivy was borne swiftly home. There, politeness seemed to indicate she must invite him in.

She was surprised by the alacrity with which her invitation was accepted—surprised also when, following her through the door, he exclaimed, "What a big, lovely place you have!"

"Why, there's hardly room enough to swing a cat!" she protested.

"You couldn't even squeeze a cat in, where I have to live," he told her. "It's a room at the hospital about half a size larger than a broom closet—at that, though, I have it better than the

interns; they cram two of them into a room of the same size."

"Sit down," Ivy invited. "I'll make some breakfast."

However, he followed her into the kitchen and leaned against the sink drainboard, looking on with obvious pleasure as Ivy moved briskly about. Dikestra said, "This is very nice, a lot different from the hospital. You are different. I always have the feeling at St. Vib's that nurses are—well, primed to make things as difficult as possible for me."

Ivy sniffed. "I could tell of a few times when residents have made it pretty difficult for me!"

"Yes," he agreed. "It is in the nature of the work, I suppose, constant tension and the fear of making a mistake, something I don't suppose we can ever get away from."

"I've often wondered why interns and residents have such a rough time—terribly long hours, low pay, and those horrible quarters—"

"I think it is for the good of our souls. We come into hospitals as interns, knowing just enough medicine to feel we have the power of life and death in our hands; proper respect for that power must be beaten into us. I thought I could never get through my year as an intern, with a resident over me who seemed meaner than Simon Legree. But I learned from him. Then I became a resident at St. Vib's, with an egotistical batch of interns to whip into shape, and—you know what they call me? Dirty Tricks Dikestra! I really keep them jumping."

"You're nearly finished with you residency—?"

"I'm beginning to count the days and hours," he affirmed. "I've stayed on several months longer to learn a little more from Dr. Fodor."

Then he would be free, Ivy thought, ready to begin practicing his specialty, surgery. It seemed probable he would do quite well, since a St. Vibiana's surgical residency was an excellent recommendation.

"I also got stuck with night duty about a month ago," he continued. "Well, actually, I volunteered. Somebody had to do it, to fill a gap. We lost a resident, and a good one. He cracked up. It happens every now and then, a hazard of the profession."

"I heard about that," Ivy commented, not adding, though she could have, that nurses occasionally cracked up, also.

She scrambled eggs and made toast, then carried a tray into the living room and watched Stan Dikestra, sitting on the small divan, devour nearly everything. "After years of St. Vib's chow," he told her, "you don't know how good this tastes!"

Ivy studied him, intense brown eyes and hollowed cheeks; he was pale and thin, needed sunshine and twenty extra

pounds, plus rest, she thought, a man who had driven himself too hard and too long.

Stan Dikestra continued talking, and she discovered just how relentless the drive in him was as he spoke of a small, rocky Idaho farm from which he had come, of his fight for an education, accomplished against an uncle who had raised him, who had seen in the boy only another pair of hands to use in working the farm.

"I was nineteen before I could enter college," Stan said, lighting a cigarette and smoking with quick nervous puffs. "It was quite a grind. So was medical school; I had to drop out once and work for a while."

He stubbed out his cigarette and lighted another—a lonely man, Ivy realized, shyly happy at the chance to confide in someone and not wise-cracking now; he had probably formed the habit of doing that as defense against a world that had never been easy for him.

And he went on broodingly, "I did some things along the way that I wish now I had handled differently—"

He looked at her quite strangely, Ivy thought, with those words. She said, "Well, you almost have it made; you'll soon be establishing your own practice—"

"Yes, there's that possibility. I can join a new medical group that is forming—five doctors, each with a specialty complementing the others; I would practice general surgery, with a guarantee of at least twenty thousand the first year. But on the other hand—"

He hesitated, rubbing his face, stubbing out his second cigarette.

"On the other hand," Stan Dikestra continued, "I have an offer—no, it is an urgent plea—to take over a little hospital three hundred miles up a jungle river in Burma. It is very primitive country, with a terrifying mortality rate. The hospital is operated by Seventh Day Adventists, good people. I owe them something. When I dropped out of medical school a year passed and it seemed I must quit for good, with no way to return. Some Seventh Day churches got together and raised the money which made it possible for me to become a doctor."

"Well—you can soon earn the money now to pay them back," Ivy pointed out.

"Yes. I can discharge that debt. But it isn't the whole of the debt I owe, and paying back the rest won't be quite as easy."

He stood up and paced restlessly over to a window, where he looked down at quiet, sun-drenched Dolores Street.

"I owe other people other things," he muttered, "and I

keep turning it all over in my head, trying to reach some decision. Now there isn't much time left."

He glanced to Ivy, as though begging her to say something. But she had no words for him—not now, at any rate—that might ease his dilemma.

Then Stan Dikestra was looking down to the street again. "I've been worrying about that patient, Cruz, with a feeling there is something we might have done but didn't. I think I'll go back to the hospital and check on him."

He stalked out, with no further word. Ivy went to the window and watched as he drove away. This time, she did not feel angry at the manner of his leave-taking, not with discovery of the problems that were harassing him. Taking the tray to the kitchen, washing dishes, she found there was a warm, maternal sort of feeling in herself where Stan Dikestra was concerned.

Ivy felt half-amused, half-angry. But the feeling persisted as she puttered about, as, nearing eleven, she prepared for bed. It seemed foolish; he would soon be leaving St. Vibiana's, moving out of her life.

Of would he—? Ivy found this question very interesting as she dozed off.

She was surprised, that night, to discover that as a result of the incident on the fifth floor by the elevator, Ivy Anders was regarded as something of a heroine by the whole hospital.

Both Meriel and Lotta Worth, who was now on duty again, were avid for details. Meriel commented, "Nothing like that ever happened to me!"

As far as Ivy was concerned, she hoped it would happen to anybody else but herself if those three came back. "Give Dr. Dikestra credit," she said. "He scared them off."

She told Sister Antonia the same thing when the hospital's night supervisor appeared on the floor. Sister Antonia, showing one of her rare smiles, said, "Dr. Dikestra insists on giving you most of the credit. It was a very regrettable incident; I hope we have taken sufficient precautions so nothing of the sort can ever occur again. I want to compliment you, Miss Anders, for the fortitude you displayed. A note of commendation has been entered in your record."

She then talked briefly about the fifth floor; Mrs. Jordan was off-duty again, ill. "Poor woman, we must give her every opportunity to recover," Sister Antonia remarked. "I have no worries about Five West, with her gone, but Five East does concern me. I would like you to check there as often as possible during the night."

This meant Ivy would be acting head nurse, a function she

had performed several times previously. It also meant another hard night, probably, for the ward count was creeping up again.

She went first to check on Sebastian Cruz, still in a haze of sedation, then looked in on Jill Mowbray, still here and probably due for discharge tomorrow. The girl had been well-scrubbed by the day nurses and looked exactly what she was, very young, only her eyes betraying the fact she had lived too much in a great hurry.

"I hear you stopped those crutty Toros from getting at Sibby," she muttered. "So I guess somebody ought to thank you."

The bruise on her face was dark and ugly. Ivy felt a momentary impulse to give Jill some good advice about Sebastian Cruz and the life she was leading. But she doubted that this girl, young in years, old in gutter knowledge, would listen. Besides, Ivy was remembering it was Jill Mowbray who had jeeringly told her she did not know what it meant to be a woman, and she did not intend to give the chit an opportunity to say such a thing again.

Ivy moved on to Sister Philomena, who showed a trace of fever but who was planning to be up and pursuing her duties again tomorrow.

She returned to the nursing station. Meriel, waiting about once more, beckoned her out to the balcony, where they could be alone.

"I want to tell you something," the other nurse said. "There won't be any more foul-ups on my shift, of any kind. I've got things all straightened out with myself."

Meriel looked off toward the vast carpet of lights that was the city. "Maybe you don't know what it means to get tangled up with a man, to have him make promises and then find he is lying with every word he speaks. Well, I do! But it isn't going to happen again."

"If you say so," Ivy responded, wondering why people seemed to be impelled to confide in her.

Meriel left. Lotta, looking after her, murmured, "There's talk that Conrad Boothby has given her the brush-off."

"Maybe it was the other way around," Ivy said.

"Maybe," Lotta agreed, though doubtfully. "If so, I'd bet he'll be at her again. He's got a reputation for not liking to be put off."

The night ran its course. Ivy managed to discharge her duties on Five West, while checking Five East. There were no emergencies.

Stan Dikestra did not appear on the floor. Nor did Ivy see

him as she lingered over breakfast in the main floor coffee shop.

Following breakfast she went to the hospital credit union and asked for a loan to cover the purchase of a new battery, to pay for the repairs that would be needed on her car's starter.

The money was handed her at once, she called a garage, a tow-truck came and her Chevvy was hauled away. But it would not be ready until Monday, which meant she must ride the bus, as she had done last night, with a walk of three blocks along a narrow side street, lights only at the corners, from the bus stop to the hospital.

This did not bother her. She had ridden the bus for some months, on first going to work at St. Vibiana's, before buying the car. Much more bothersome was the prospect of having to repay the loan. Her budget would be strained to the limit.

She must find somebody to share her apartment.

Or she must make some other move, and her thoughts flew, as though drawn by a magnet, to Stan Dikestra.

Ivy had a vivid mental picture of herself standing beside him, perhaps, in the fairly near future. But standing where—?

He was an idealist; he might decide to go to Burma. Could she find it in herself to accompany him, if he did? She had better give this some serious consideration, Ivy told herself, had better be ready with an answer, should he ask. She had a feeling that Stan was going to ask her to be with him, no matter which course his life took.

No question of quitting her profession would be involved. Stan would need her skills, could make great use of them, whatever he decided to do with his life.

Then, with the coming of another night, Stan Dikestra did appear on Five West, for an examination of Sebastian Cruz, but there was no chance to talk to him in private, for they were not alone. Lotta was hovering nearby.

Something in his manner, though, in his eyes, told Ivy she was very much in his thoughts. He would be seeking an opportunity to talk to her, she felt certain, and probably quite soon.

Dr. Paul Farrow showed up again, later, to stand about for a few minutes in his shy manner. Lotta murmured, after his departure, "Seems like that man is sure getting mighty interested in somebody on this floor."

"I don't see how I can ask him to stay away," Ivy said.

"I don't suppose it would do much good if you did," Lotta decided. "He's a man unhappy with his wife, I hear, and that kind is awfully hard to discourage."

Only a week or so ago, Ivy recalled, she had been bothered by the fact there were no men in her life. Since, three of them

had appeared—and all on the same night, the night Dick Rudd had cut his arm.

Dick had come and gone, and Paul Farrow did not matter to her; she had no intention of letting there be even the beginning of anything with him, whether he was hard to discourage or not.

Only Stan Dikestra mattered to her now, the only one she wanted to matter.

Then, shortly past three that morning, the phone rang and Dick Rudd said, "Hello, Ivy."

Her heart was instantly in her throat. A pulse hammered like a tom-tom at her temples.

He said, "I've been very busy, but I am taking Sunday off. Will you have dinner with me that evening?"

No! Ivy thought.

She heard herself say, "Yes, Dick."

Her treacherous heart continued to pound hard. There was an effervescent bubbling in her veins at the sound of his masculine growl in her ear.

"Will it be all right if I pick you up at your place at six-thirty? I know you have to get back early," he said.

"Six-thirty will be fine," Ivy assured him.

Her hand trembled slightly as she hung up, while asking herself severely why on earth she had done such a thing.

No answer came, except that she was a woman and would be on pins and needles until she saw him again.

VII

It seemed then that time crawled, as Ivy waited for the arrival of Sunday evening—with something happening in the meantime.

This occurred on the third night that she rode the bus.

The side street leading from the bus stop to the hospital was narrow, with houses crowding it solidly on both sides, small bungalows built back in the twenties, now falling into dilapidation as the blight of a slum spread here. Those houses all seemed to be dark at night; there were only the small pools of light at each corner, arc lights hanging over the centers of the intersections, the illumination from them not spreading very far.

However, Ivy had no fear of the dark. On this night, Saturday, she strode briskly along, with the transient thought

that she would have to do this only one more time. She was less than a block from where the street ended at the east side of St. Vibiana's—the ambulance entrance was located there, also the nuns' home and chapel, a brightly lighted area —when she became suddenly aware of footsteps behind her, of being followed.

Ivy wheeled about. There were five of them, stopping nearby on the walk, standing there, no sound breaking the night's quiet. She spoke brusquely, "Who are you? What do you want?"

One of them came on a few steps, replying to her, and Ivy recognized the voice of Jill Mowbray, discharged from St. Vibiana's yesterday. "Don't be scared. We're here just to see that you make it to the hospital okay."

The girl wore tight pants and a jacket, also a long-billed cap. The other four, Ivy thought, were all males.

Jill continued, "This isn't our idea, but Sibby's. He told me to make sure the Toros don't cause you any trouble. I think you're off your rocker, walking along here like this, but as long as you do it we're going to see that nobody bothers you."

"That's nonsense! Nobody is going to bother me!" Ivy said.

"Maybe not. But you can't ever tell," Jill said. "Like, those Toros can be meaner than snakes."

"Go away, all of you!" Ivy snapped.

But they did not go away, though they did not continue to follow her, either. A glance back, presently, showed they were still standing on the walk.

On reaching Five West, Ivy went to the room of Sebastian Cruz before relieving Meriel Hoad. He twisted toward the door as she entered, an animal-like wariness in his manner, eyes holding a flat, hard shine, a handsome youth with his olive-dark coloring, and she could understand the attraction he held for Jill Mowbray.

"I saw some friends of yours a few minutes ago," Ivy said. "How did you find out I must ride the bus to work for a couple of nights?"

"We've got ways of finding out," Sebastian Cruz said. "And we take care of people who help us."

"I wasn't helping you. I was only ordering some intruders to leave the hospital."

"Try telling that to the Toros. I passed word to keep an eye on you. It'll go on until I say to quit."

There was arrogance in his manner. The police had questioned him, as soon as he could talk, but he had absolutely refused to tell them anything. "Like, it was too dark to see

anybody, man, and they came at me too fast," he had said. "I can't put names on who it was that carved me up."

Ivy had heard the police wanted him for a parole violation, that he would probably spend some time in jail as soon as he was able to do so.

She examined his dressings. He had a lean, tough body, but it had been wickedly assaulted. The slash across his abdomen had required twenty stitches to close, and he had taken other cuts as well. In another day or so he would be transferred to County General, which was required by law for indigents. While St. Vibiana's gave a great deal of free care, especially in its out patients clinic, it could not afford to donate this room for Sebastian's convalescence.

"Look," he said, "I don't like being here any more than you people like having me. Give me my clothes; let me clear out!"

Ivy snorted. "So you can go after those who did this to you—?"

He made no reply, but the glitter of his eyes was answer enough. He meant to go after them.

"Next time, you're liable to come in D.O.A., dead on arrival, ticketed for the morgue," Ivy continued. "Where is the point of all of it? Why don't you quit such foolishness, settle down, get a job? And marry that girl!"

He grimaced bitterly. "It's easy for people like you to preach. You don't know what it's like, can't ever know. They call me a cholo, see?—somebody who just gets shoved around, if I stand still and take it. Well, I'm not taking it! And if my number comes up, I've had a fast life, with plenty of kicks. Now, do I get my clothes?"

"No," Ivy said.

"I'll walk out anyway," he threatened. "Those lousy cops aren't going to put their hands on me!"

"You won't do any walking out on my shift," Ivy said. "You might not be worth the care you're getting, but you'll get it, nevertheless. As for your talk about being shoved around—well, I have a nurse working with me who could tell you what that really means; so could her husband. They're colored, but they have worked hard instead of squawking about being mistreated, and have made places for themselves. So could you, if you wanted to."

But all of this seemed a waste of time. Also, Ivy thought, it was a violation of one of nursing's first principles, not to become personally and emotionally involved with a patient.

"Tell those friends of yours to stay away from me!" she said, leaving him.

It was, at last, Sunday afternoon, with the alarm clock shaking her awake at five-thirty.

Ivy bathed, raised a cloud of dusting powder in the bathroom and spent half an hour, with one eye on the clock, doing her hair, then her nails, allowing herself the luxury of cherry-red polish which would have to come off before she went to work.

She brought out her best dress, a strapless black semi-formal with a short skirt and matching bolero jacket which would serve as a wrap; nothing more would be needed, in this weather.

Open-toed spectators and flesh-tone nylons completed her attire. For jewelry, she chose a crystal necklace and earrings, then hunted around in a drawer for a small decorative wrist-watch, a present from her mother at the time of her capping; her working wrist-watch was of stainless steel, with a luminous dial and red sweep-second hand.

Putting the watch on, she thought for a moment of her mother, married again after lengthy widowhood, one of Ivy's reasons for leaving Mercy Hospital and the San Francisco bay area. Becoming accustomed to a new husband and three young stepchildren had seemed difficult enough for her mother without having a grown daughter around.

Inspecting herself after a careful application of lipstick, she decided that the general result was as good as she could possibly achieve—short of plastering on more make-up, at least, but she had never used very much and decided not to attempt to heighten the effect now. Her brows and lashes were so dark that mascara and eye-shadow did not do a great deal for her.

With a fluttery feeling of nervousness she settled herself to wait. Promptly at six-thirty her door buzzer sounded.

"Come in, Dick! It is so nice to see you again."

Her hands seemed to be flying distractedly about. She put them to work in the kitchen, opening a bottle of prepared Martinis. They sipped together, Ivy groping for small talk. The cocktail seemed tasteless to her; she averaged not more than a drink or so a year, aside from Christmas and New Year celebrations. Dick did not seem to care for it, either, turning the glass between his hands and putting it aside presently, only half-emptied. "I guess we had better go, Ivy. I made reservations at the Westward Ho for about seven. It's out in the valley and quite a distance from here, even on the freeway."

He was very nicely turned out, Ivy thought, in a Navy-blue

suit with a crisp white shirt, a narrow maroon tie, heavy gold cufflinks at his wrists. Dick had made an obvious effort to make himself as presentable as possible.

Was he also nervous and constrained by this date? It seemed so, and matters had not eased very much by the time they reached the restaurant, a very expensive-looking place and about as far removed as one could get from a St. Vibiana's coffee shop.

They were conducted to a table on a terrace where it was quite cool. Candles burned between them. Ivy almost gasped as she studied a large, embossed menu, noting the prices; Dick insisted on ordering for both of them, and quick mental arithmetic told her the dinner check, with a preliminary round of drinks, would total thirty dollars or more.

Such lavishness was not at all necessary and she tried to tell Dick so, with care for the touchiness of male pride, "It is all very nice here, and I'm tremendously impressed. Still—"

"I wanted something for both of us to remember," Dick said.

This might mean there would be nothing else to remember, other than the Fern Canyon picnic, though Ivy told herself this could not be what he had in mind. She decided to let him splurge.

He continued talking. There was something on Dick Rudd's mind, now being disclosed. He had heard of the incident on Wednesday night at the hospital. It had angered him, and his anger was still simmering. "Street punks threatening you! I wish to God I had been there when that knife was pulled! And that's the sort of thing you have to go through because of being a nurse!"

"Oh, Dick, please don't make so much of it," Ivy said. "Nothing of the kind has ever happened to me before. It isn't likely to happen again, even if I spend the next twenty years at St. Vibiana's."

He frowned, features heavy. "So now you're planning to spend the next twenty years there—?"

"I'm not planning anything!"

She felt upset, miserable. Thus quickly, it seemed, the evening had gone awry. Ivy tried to pull herself together, to make the attempt to turn it into more pleasant channels.

But Dick would not have it that way. He wanted to know about a rumor that the Knights, Sebastian Cruz' gang, were protecting her on her nightly walk from the bus stop to the hospital. Ivy said, "How in the world did you hear about that?"

"We're constantly watching those gangs, all over the city;

we have contacts, informants, and we pick up a good many whispers about what is going on."

He must have asked that those whispers be relayed to him; he was checking on her again, Ivy thought, and her anger began to rise. But she kept it in check. "Well, I have only seen those people once, last night. I told them to go away," Ivy said.

"Why on earth are you walking to the hospital anyway?" Dick demanded.

Ivy explained about her car, and that she would have it again tomorrow.

Dick said, "Why didn't you let me know you were without a car? I could have driven you to work, would have been glad to! I'll drive you tonight."

"You will not!" she responded instantly.

He studied her with a baffled expression. Dick Rudd said, "Why are you so hard-headed?"

"I'm not!"

But, Ivy was then forced to acknowledge to herself, she was—in some things, at least. She had been independent for so long, accustomed to tackling problems and seeing them through, that it had not occurred to her to call on Dick or anyone else for help in getting to work. The problem of making it to her job had been there and she had coped with it in forthright fashion, in the only way possible considering the circumstances.

And to turn him down about such a matter seemed rather foolish. What difference could it possibly make if Dick drove her to work tonight? Ivy almost relented, almost said the words that would tell him he could do so. But he spoke again, and she perceived that this matter was only a small part of the larger problem confronting them.

Dick said, "I had a lot of hope for this evening—thought maybe I said too much too soon at Fern Canyon and said it badly, that things might work out better if I tried again. But it doesn't seem I'm going to have any more luck now than I did then."

"About me quitting nursing—?"

"Yes."

"Dick, I can't do that. I'm terribly sorry, but I just can't."

He nodded, in wooden acceptance of her decision.

Food was before them and they began to eat, all about them the clinking of silverware and crystal, muted laughter, people enjoying themselves. There was a multi-colored fountain splashing in the near distance, and a thin silver new moon hung low above dark hills. This moment was one to treasure,

Ivy thought, but it seemed likely she would recall it more with pain than with pleasure.

She said, "Dick, if you only wouldn't insist on that—!"

Ivy knew quite well what these words meant, that she was commiting herself and would marry Dick Rudd if he would withdraw his demand. But the words were spoken and she felt no inclination to recall them.

He shook his head. "I'm sorry; I had a dream of the way things could be. I can't change it, Ivy."

He was the one who was now being hard-headed, wholly unreasonable, she thought, and had a momentary impulse, almost overwhelming, to give in to him. Nurses got married and quit the profession every day. Was she so terribly different from them, to oppose Dick Rudd's wishes?

Then Ivy knew the answer; she *was* different. There were all kinds of nurses, just as there were all kinds of everything else—including policemen, to which she was sure Dick would agree. Some took their work very seriously, with a sense of dedication to it; some did not. Ivy Anders belonged to the former group.

Ambition, pride, the sense of dedication—all were bearing on her. Not even for Dick Rudd could she abandon them.

Nibbling distractedly, she said, "This tastes very good. What is it?"

"Crab a la something or other," Dick muttered. "I had it here once before, a dinner given for a captain who was retiring from the department, and have wanted ever since to come back again some time."

He had wanted to come back with a girl, to be with her in this romantic setting, Ivy thought. Poor Dick; he was getting very little for his money. She set herself determinedly to be companionable, asking about his work. He seemed pleased by her interest and talked readily enough, even with animation, beginning to eat with more zest.

They had achieved a semblance of pleasant friendliness by the time of the dessert, something in flames which was served with an amusing theatrical flourish which made both of them laugh. It attracted attention to their table, and Ivy had a sense of them being an attractive couple, Dick muscular and handsome, and as for herself—well, her shoulders were a powdery shimmer by candlelight and she felt that she complemented him very nicely.

If things could only be a little different—!

They lingered over liquers and cigarettes, with the pleasant talk continuing, the pretense that all was well between them.

Then Ivy glanced at her watch. "Dick, I'm afraid it is growing rather late."

Cinderella's time was running out; in less than two hours she must be at work again on Five West.

He nodded agreeably, signaled for the check, glanced to it casually, paid with two twenty dollar bills and waved the waiter away with the change. He rose and took her arm as they sauntered out.

Then they were in his car, heading back to the city, and it was as though a muffling blanket had been dropped over each of them. There was nothing more to talk about.

And she could take no more of these silent returns to her apartment, Ivy thought wearily, of the stubborn argument between them which could not be resolved. When she told him good-night it must really be good-bye.

Dick Rudd braked to a stop on Dolores Street. Ivy said, speaking rapidly, "It was all very nice, and I want to thank you for an evening I shan't ever forget. But I don't think we should meet again. Dick, you must find yourself a nice girl who isn't so h-hard-headed—"

He turned to her. She was in his arms, his lips found hers in fierce hunger, and he breathed. "Ivy, for God's sake don't say this is the end! It can't be—!"

She yielded to him. For a long, long minute Ivy Anders accepted his kisses, and returned them, feeling hunger and desire also. During that minute she felt tempted again to capitulate, to give in to him, on his terms.

But again she could not. Ivy pulled herself away. She opened the car door and got out. "I must hurry. There is no need for you to come up with me."

"I'll wait and drive you to work."

"No."

"I'll call you—"

"Please don't," Ivy said.

She went up the outside stairway to the second floor, rather surprised that she could walk so steadily and could resist an urge to look back.

His car started before she reached the landing. He drove away.

Ivy unlocked her door and stepped into her apartment. She stood for a moment with her back against the door, aware of a brief stinging sensation in her eyes. But no tears came. She refused to do any more weeping for her ill-starred affair with Dick Rudd.

It was over, forget it, she ordered herself, with her thoughts

now turning to Stan Dikestra. Sometime soon she must contrive to see Stan and talk to him, must learn more about the decision he soon had to make and find a way to let him know that she also might become involved in that decision, if he cared to ask that she do so.

VIII

Ivy saw Stan Dikestra again the following morning. Coming from the nursing office, where she had agreed to postpone her nights off—the night nurse on Five East had been called away by a death in her family, and Ivy had agreed to help Mrs. Jordan cover the ward until her return—she walked into the main floor coffee shop and discovered him sitting alone at a table, wearing a green surgical cap and gown, white mask loose and dangling on his chest.

Lines of fatigue marked his face. He was staring off into space. Heart fluttering a little, Ivy slid into a chair across from him. "Hello, Stan," she said.

His attention seemed to fix on her slowly. Then he smiled. "That is the first time you have used my name. I like it."

She gave her order, coffee and a hot sweet roll. "You look as though surgery has been very busy," Ivy observed.

"Yes. Cases stack up at times, and we're short-handed. I started operating at five this morning, am going to assist Dr. Fodor in a mastoidectomy in about ten minutes before I can knock off."

He had a cigarette burning. Obviously forgetting it, he lighted another—too much work, Ivy thought, too many demands on him; why must health care require so much of those who dedicated themselves to its service? And he went on, "By the way, Sebastian Cruz is being moved to County General tomorrow."

Ivy was glad to hear this. Looking after Cruz had continued to exact a great deal of time and effort on her part.

Sipping her coffee, trying to make her tone casual and offhand, she said, "Only a few more days here for you—?"

He nodded, yes. "And I have made up my mind concerning the future. It is going to be private practice."

This was what Ivy wanted to hear, which way he would turn. She was glad that it had not been necessary for her to do any digging in order to learn his decision.

Stan continued, "As a matter of fact, I have already

managed to sit in on several consultations with the group I'm going to join—the hospital concurring, of course. A little in the way of fees was involved, not much, but the money sure helps, the first fees I've managed to earn as a doctor."

Ivy smiled. "Congratulations!"

"Thanks," Stan said, also smiling wryly. "It's certainly time for me to have something to show for all of the years and effort I've put out. Maybe the dreams of big fees and Cadillacs that every med. student can't keep from having will come true yet!"

He glanced to his watch, took out some coins, spilled them on the table, and stood up. "Time to scrub and change and get with it again. I'll be seeing you, Ivy."

He strode away, and Ivy had a sense of being forgotten before the coffee shop doors swung shut behind him. It gave her a let-down feeling, and she scolded herself. What had she expected—that he would discuss his future in more detail at this time and place?

He had said he would be seeing her. And everything might be exactly right at the time of their next meeting.

She went to pick up her car, drove it home, slept, and returned to St. Vibiana's.

Meriel was also relieved by the news that Sebastian Cruz would be moved tomorrow. "If I had my way, I would throw his clothes at him and let the arrogant pup walk out right now!" Meriel said.

She did not linger tonight, but left as soon as Ivy took over. Lotta Worth murmured, "Merry is starting to be in a hurry again. Do you suppose she has another man on the string already—or Conrad Boothby back again?"

Ivy had no time to think about this. The hospital patient count was creeping up again and there was the problem of Five East, where Mrs. Jordan was trying to make it through the night short-handed.

Ivy conferred with her at the head nurse's office, on that side of the building. Mrs. Jordan remarked wanly, "I feel as though I should be off myself, but I have done too much of that lately. I'll try not to lean on you too much."

And, "Ivy, you don't know how much you are to be envied for your strength and good health!"

This was true enough; Ivy had never spent as much as a minute in a hospital bed. Returning to Five West, she sent Lotta to help out on the east side. "I'll take care of things here," she said.

"You'll have to work overtime to get everything caught up," Lotta scolded. "It can't go on like this. When are they going

to straighten this floor out, proper help and a head nurse who can handle the job? You know who I'm thinking about for that, too!"

"Scoot!" Ivy ordered.

She began to make rounds on Five West, moving quickly.

Sister Philomena, still here in spite of her resolution to leave, was awake and restive. "I have indulged myself enough," she informed Ivy. "Tomorrow I absolutely must return to my duties."

"You get some rest," Ivy retorted, "or I won't let you go."

"Dear, at my age there is no time to be wasted on rest," Sister Philomena said gently. "Anyway, I do feel quite fit."

Past two, a warm, sultry morning, Stan Dikestra came along. He had checked on Sebastian Cruz. "That abdominal cut isn't healing very well, but he is going out of here, nevertheless, at about noon," Stan informed Ivy, while pouring himself a cup of coffee. "The County will give him first-rate care—better, perhaps, than we can offer."

This was probably true. County General, a colossus among hospitals, had every conceivable facility for the treatment of the indigent sick. Ivy had thought, before coming to St. Vibiana's, of working there, but the vastness of the place, more than two thousand beds, had made her fear she would become lost in it.

Stan went on, "We are losing a first-rate surgical night nurse downstairs. She is marrying a doctor. Sometimes I think a surgical gown is the most efficient man-trap ever devised, though there is a good deal to be said for a nurse's uniform, too, at least where doctors are concerned."

She was trying to listen, while continuing with her work.

Holding the cup in his strong surgeon's fingers, he cleared his throat. "Ivy, this is the only free moment I have had in days. There is something I must say that I can't keep bottled up any longer."

Oh no, she thought, not now; she simply had no time to spare. But Ivy looked up at him, beside her, saw the expression and the intensity of his gaze, fixed hungrily on her, and she put her pen aside. Surely a minute or two would not matter, especially for a turning point in her life, which must be what was about to happen.

She wanted this moment with him, and must have it, even if all of the red bulbs outside of all the doors on her ward should suddenly light up simultaneously.

"Yes, Stan?" she said, her heart seeming to squeeze tight.

He put his cup aside and reached to take her hand. "This is an odd time and place for it," Stan said. "I wish there could

be moonlight and soft music. But maybe the setting is appropriate, at that, because of what we are and always will be, the white walls here and those charts, and something in the air . . . formalin—?"

Ivy was torn between a desire to laugh and an equal desire to tell him in exasperation that no preliminary talk was necessary. But she reminded herself that not all men, of course, had the forthrightness of Dick Rudd.

"Yes, Stan?" Ivy said again, her voice somewhat tremulous.

However, he did not continue. Some strange reluctance seemed to hold Dr. Stan Dikestra mute. His grip tightened on her hand, and the intensity of his gaze was even stronger. A muscle twitched in his cheek, his lips moved slightly but he did not speak.

It was very difficult for Ivy to keep from crying out, from telling him he did not have to say anything, her answer was yes.

Then Stan was looking away from her, along the corridor. Someone was approaching. It was Mrs. Jordan, Ivy realized, moving at a jerky, wavering pace, stopping, reaching out in a pleading gesture and then sinking down to one knee and leaning against the wall like a very tired child.

Stan relinquished Ivy's hand and hurried to her. The head nurse's features, saffron-hued in the dim light, and the sudden loud chattering of her teeth told their own story to him, and to Ivy, who hurried around the desk and ran to her also.

He swept the woman up in his arms. "Which room, quickly?"

"Five-oh-nine," Ivy said, leading the way. She turned on the lights and hurriedly stripped back the cover sheet of the bed there. Stan Dikestra put Mrs. Jordan down gently. Though shaken by the hard chill which was racking her, the harried woman managed to speak, gaspingly, "I'm so sorry—to be such a nuisance— So much to do; I forgot my atabrine tonight—"

Feeling the onset of the malarial attack, she had struggled to reach Ivy Anders.

"Take it easy," Stan Dikestra told her. "Miss Anders, get her undressed and well covered against the chill. I'll notify the night lab technician to get up here, stat—" this was medical shorthand meaning right now "—and take a blood culture. Ten grains of aspirin, to cope with the fever. I'll check with Dr. Hanvey; he has been treating her and can let you know her proper atabrine dosage. She may need some glucose, I.V., later, if there is an excessive loss of liquid through perspiration. I'll also advise Sister Antonia."

Sister Antonia came into the room some minutes later. Ivy had Mrs. Jordan well blanketed and warmed against the recurrent chills. With the aspirin, she was beginning to drift into an easing haze of slumber. "Her fever peaked at a hundred and five, Sister," Ivy reported. "It has receded slightly."

The nun's lips compressed as she touched the patient's forehead. Sister Antonia, who could write three college degrees after her name, was also an R.N., of many years' experience.

"Poor woman, she has tried so hard to overcome this," the hospital's night supervisor sighed. "Now I am afraid the time may have come when she does not have enough strength left to try any longer. However, the decision about that must be made my Mother Superior and the hospital board. Now—there is the matter of covering the entire floor for the balance of the night—"

"I'll manage, somehow," Ivy said.

"It is too much to ask that you attempt such a thing alone," Sister Antonia said. "I think I will sit with her for a few minutes. Then I will turn to and lend you a hand."

So, Ivy thought, returning to the desk with three o'clock rounds due, she had lost the moment with Stan Dikestra, who had left the floor. She could not, of course, feel any anger at Mrs. Jordan. Also, the moment must come again. She did feel a little depressed, though; if only the onset of Mrs. Jordan's attack could have been delayed another minute or so—!

"Oh, forget it," she admonished herself, "and get busy!"

However, there was a strange, nebulous sort of uneasiness in her that would not go away, a feeling of some vague, invisible obstacle between herself and Stan Dikestra that was keeping him from speaking and that might keep them apart for good if he did not commit himself before terminating his residency and leaving the hospital. But Ivy Anders could not begin to guess what that obstacle was.

Sister Antonia did pitch in and help, telling Ivy to give the orders, and obeying them, right up to shift-changing time at seven-thirty, when she swept away at her apparently tireless pace.

Ivy had to stay on until nine o'clock, tying up all of the loose ends of the floor. She was bringing the last chart to its final entry when a message reached her; the hospital's governing board would meet at eleven, and would Miss Anders present herself at that time, please?

She waited out the intervening time in the coffee shop, smoking more cigarettes than were good for her, knowing

there could be only one reason for such a summons. Ivy hoped Stan Dikestra would come in so she could talk it over with him. But Stan did not appear, and when she presented herself as requested at the board room on the main floor, she felt a little shaky in the knees, not quite sure what she would do during the next few minutes.

The Mother Superior, Mother Mary Gabriel, was presiding; she was ascetic and frail, like Sister Philomena, and also a golden anniversary nun. It was rumored she would soon retire to a convent in Rome, to be succeeded by Sister Antonia, who was present, as was Dr. Fodor, chief of the medical staff, white-haired and gnome-like, who offered Ivy his puckish smile as she entered. The Dr. Hanvey mentioned by Stan Dikestra was also present, wearing an impatient frown. And there was a lean young whippet of a man in clerical garb; this was a Monsignor, serving as representative of the Archbishop of the diocese, who also happened to be a Cardinal.

"Miss Anders, ordinarily we would not observe the formality of summoning you in this manner, but the circumstances are rather unusual," Mother Mary Gabriel began. "First, about Mrs. Jordan. In the opinion of Dr. Hanvey, she must have a lengthy period of rest and care. Do I quote you correctly, Doctor—?"

"Quite," Dr. Hanvey replied shortly. "I am surprised she has managed to keep going for so long."

"Therefore," the Mother Superior continued, "arrangements are being made for her admission to a diocese rest home, and I am sure the prayers of all of us go with her. Now, concerning the matter of her successor in charge of the fifth floor—"

She paused, opened a folder before her and glanced at its contents—her own folder from the personal file, Ivy realized —they went on, "Ordinarily, Miss Anders, your age would preclude against selecting you, but Sister Antonia has pointed out that you have already filled Mrs. Jordan's position on many nights. The board has therefore agreed to offer you appointment as head nurse. Do you accept?"

A sudden twinkling smile eased the formality of her words. Mother Superior obviously felt there aws no doubt what Ivy's answer would be.

However, Ivy hesitated, while a number of things, already lengthily considered at the coffee shop, flashed through her mind.

It would mean promotion, of course, a step upward in her profession, coming much sooner than she had anticipated.

It would also mean more pay. Should she tell them, though, that if she did accept it might be for only a few days or weeks, that she might soon be leaving the hospital?

Ivy had debated this point with herself, arriving at several different conclusions. She reviewed them hurriedly now, and the most dominant conclusion seemed to be that she would sound like a fool if she stated her reason for possibly leaving was that she might marry a man who had not yet quite gotten around to asking her and who, for some indefinable reason, might never get around to it.

No matter how long she held the job, Ivy decided, the experience would be helpful. Also—well, there was the plain fact that she was itching to tackle the management of the fifth floor at night wholly on her own, and not merely as a fill-in. "Yes, Mother," she replied. "I will accept, and thank you."

There was an immediate relaxation about the table, and pleased smiles. The problem that had been settled here was not tremendously important, but it had had some thorny aspects, since not all nurses, by any means, had administrative ability, and the selection of a new night head nurse for a fifty-bed floor could have required a considerable amount of time nad effort.

"Good girl!" Dr. Fodor said, rising to seize her hand and shake it. "I know you'll do a great job!"

He had a booming voice, absurdly at variance with his size and age. He also had a surgeon's hand-grip, squeezing like a vise.

The others congratulated her, too. Then Ivy found herself out of the room, still a little shaky in the knees—and still no Stan Dikestra to be appraised of her new status, though she wandered hopefully about the main floor for some time, hoping to run into him.

Confound him, Ivy thought in sudden irritation. And enough of this nonsense, of her hopeful dreams; become involved with a man, she told herself dourly, and immediately everything became all tangled up, difficult. She was beginning to feel not at all sure she would have an affirmative answer for him even if he did break through that shadowy obstacle and ask her.

Then, leaving the hospital, Ivy was confronted with something which made her forget all about Stan Dikestra.

She saw a group of the dark-haired, wolfish, jacket-clad young men, shuffling along on the opposite side of the street, four of them, including Sebastian Cruz, who was in the middle, supported by two of these four.

They must have reached his room in the guise of visitors, Ivy realized instantly, had taken him clothes and he had walked out with them. It was quite possible to do this, during the daytime bustle in St. Vibiana's corridors. No guard had been set over him, the police no doubt figuring that as only a parole violater he did not rate such attention. Also, they had probably figured that he would not have enough strength to attempt this.

Ivy hurried across the street. "You aren't well enough to be up!" she cried. "Get back to your bed, at once!"

The face of Sebastian Cruz was lined and gray. "They aren't going to stick me behind bars at County General," he muttered. "Get out of the way."

"But there is danger of infection, of peritonitis," she protested. "You could die, Sebastian—!"

She was shoved aside. Sebastian was helped into a car, a dusty old sedan parked at the curb. It accelerated fast, speeding away. Ivy looked helplessly after the car. Not until too late did it occur to her to attempt to read its license number.

Perhaps it was good riddance—all of the care lavished on him, and to what purpose? Only a return to the wild streets if he survived, Ivy thought, and maybe D.O.A. the next time he was brought in, with the same for that reckless girl, Jill Mowbray. But at the same time he was a patient who had been consigned to her charge during the night hours, and Ivy felt a sense of outrage as she hurried back to the hospital to report that Sebastian Cruz was gone.

IX

It was something which created a momentary stir at St. Vibiana's. Stan Dikestra was summoned to the nursing office and came blinking drowsily, an indication he had been trying to get some sleep. Stan gave it as his opinion that, without medical help for some time to come, Cruz was liable to be in a very bad way.

"He's a tough character—had to be, to make out as well as he did. But that cut in his middle is still open and draining," Stan said. "And, considering the grime and dirt of the sort of place where his friends probably have taken him, my prognosis would have to be almost certain infection and not much hope of survival if it takes hold."

The police were notified; it became their job to try to find Sebastian Cruz. And it seemed to Ivy that Stan Dikestra was uneasy in her presence, that he did not want to talk to her. Well, she thought, so be it, and she went on home.

That night, Ivy had to run a gamut of congratulations on having become head nurse—from Trude, from Charlie Bell, and from others who came to the floor to wish her well. There was an excited hug from Lotta Worth, and Meriel seemed pleased also. The warmth of Meriel's congratulations surprised and flattered Ivy.

"Though you can have the job; I wouldn't want it, myself," the blonde nurse remarked. "You're in for a lot of headaches."

She was so right, Ivy soon decided after moving to her new office on the opposite side of the building. There was now a great deal of paper work to handle, time-cards, records of admissions and discharges, a nightly report to prepare, bed by bed, for the entire floor, plus reams of insurance forms to fill out.

Ivy had not been required to do any of this before, when substituting for Mrs. Jordan. Now she had to buckle down and learn how to handle the forms and reports. Also, new and unfamiliar demands on her time and energy seemed to crop up every other minute for a while, each of them demanding instant, decisive action on her part.

There were rounds to be made during the night, though not as often as when she had been a staff nurse, with supervision of the personnel in her charge, and she found a problem confronting her at once; the R.N. assigned to replace Ivy Anders was elderly, only marking time until she could start drawing her pension, she was quite slow in handling her duties, and this meant added work for Lotta Worth.

On her first night as head nurse Ivy almost wore herself out, unable to resist the temptation to pitch in with help at bedsides where it seemed to be needed—and, she knew quite well, she must not do this except in cases of serious emergency. On the second night she managed to stay mostly at her desk and to handle the paper work, while thinking enviously of the day shift, which rated a ward clerk. But to persuade a qualified clerk to work at night was almost impossible.

It was on the third night when two unusual patients were admitted, one to Five West, the other to Five East, and Ivy left her desk to become personally involved with both of them, knowing she should not do so, with a sense these involvements could cause her trouble—a feeling which time was to prove completely right.

It began with the Five West admission, brought up by Charlie Bell on his stretcher cart. This patient was a handsome, robust-seeming, gentle-mannered boy named Toby McLarnin. Stan Dikestra also came up in the elevator with him, and Stan was at his wisecracking best, an instant warning that something was seriously wrong with Toby McLarnin.

"Sport, I've seen some guys slip in here under false pretenses, but you take the cake," Stan said. "You sure there isn't a pretty nurse on the staff that you hope to make some time with by conning us into thinking there is something wrong with you only because you're limping a little?"

Charlie Bell gave Ivy a look which was a further warning. Ivy glanced at the admission record as the boy was made comfortable in 505.

Five days ago, Toby McLarnin, eighteen and due to enter Stanford in another few weeks, had suffered a fall while hiking at Yosemite. Shaken up but seemingly suffering no more than minor scrapes and bruises, he had returned home. Two days ago, a black spot not much larger than a pinhead had appeared on his left heel. It had started to grow. His leg had begun to swell, had become painful.

Ivy went into the room and promptly lost her heart to Toby McLarnin, as did Lotta Worth and the night nurse who were fussing over him. He was the only son of wealthy parents, but unspoiled, unaffected and abashed by the fact that he was here.

"I had a sprained ankle last year from playing football that acted up worse than this," he said. "But my folks got a little worried when I started to limp and the swelling began. They called our doctor tonight and he made me come here."

Stan ruffled his crisply-curling auburn hair. "We'll put on some hot packs to cope with that swelling and have you out in no time," Stan said. "You make these nurses jump for you, now. After all, this room is setting your old man back forty bucks a day and you ought to have something in return for his money."

"Shucks, I don't want to make trouble for anybody!" Toby McLarnin protested.

Ivy could not resist smoothing his hair. It had a silky feel under her palm. "You make a little trouble if you feel like it," she said.

Stan Dikestra left the room and Sister Philomena came in; she had made good on her resolve to be up and around again, and Ivy supposed she must have been in or near the Admitting Room, to learn about Toby McLarnin. Sister Philomena was

assigned to the childrens' wards, but she took to her heart any case involving those who were young.

Ivy followed Stan out. He was talking to a doctor who wore a pinched, harried expression—who paced off, head bent, hands clasped tightly behind his back, and Stan muttered, "That is the McLarnin family physician. He knew the truth, of course, when he saw the boy's leg, but couldn't bring himself to tell his parents. Now he'll have to do that."

Stan put a cigarette in his mouth and chewed on it. Ivy had seen a similar case once at Mercy Hospital in San Francisco, that one a truck-driver whose leg had been struck a glancing blow by a bumper in a minor accident and who had dismissed it as of no consequence. She remembered with coldness the price that the truck-driver had been required to pay, and said, "Is there any hope—?"

"There is always hope. Dr. Fodor is coming up to have a look and we're bringing in specialists, all we can round up in a hurry. But dear God, if he had been brought in even a day earlier—!"

Stan threw his cigarette savagely on the floor, and added, "If the answer is negative, well . . ."

Ivy said tightly, "At the knee—?"

He shook his head, then left her, going to meet Dr. Fodor, who was hurriedly approaching, accompanied by another man who did not wear a hospital jacket, the first of the specialists Stan had mentioned.

Ivy felt sick, watching them go into the room.

The trouble with Toby McLarnin, insidiously spreading in his sturdy body, could be summed up by a word which had a lovely sound if one did not understand its deadly meaning. The word was gangrene.

Some obscure tissue or vein damage had been caused by Toby's fall. There was poisonous rot in his leg. It would kill him, if not excised. And it was probable—some hope, Stan Dikestra had said, but his tone had indicated there was very little—that the only way to accomplish removal of the gangrene was by removal of the leg, and at the hip.

Sister Philomena came out of the room, dabbed a finger-tip at her eyes and murmured, "The poor, poor boy."

She went away, limping heavily. Ivy almost spoke, to say that Sister Philomena did not look at all well and perhaps had tried to get up again too soon. But the nun's several moments with Toby McLarnin had obviously shaken her and perhaps this accounted for her unsteadiness and deep pallor.

Then Ivy saw Charlie Bell was back, with the admission for Five East, and she went to check on that, with relief at turn-

ing her thoughts to something else—this new case, which had a lip-quirking aspect. Ivy smiled only briefly, though, and before long she was quite annoyed.

The patient's name was Ray Genther. He was a professional basketball player. This had nothing to do with his ailment, which was kidney trouble; he was here to be prepared for an operation. However, it did have something to do with the problem presented to Ivy by Ray Genther, who was colored, soft-voiced and sadly resigned to the fact there was a problem, which accompanied him wherever he went.

He was seven feet tall. And there was no bed on the floor which could accommodate his gangling length.

"Don't let it bother you none, Miss," Ray Genther begged. "I'm used to the fact by now that things just aren't scaled right for somebody like me. On road trips when I have to stay in hotels, I mostly just sleep on the floor."

"Well, you certainly aren't going to sleep on the floor in St. Vibiana's!" Ivy exclaimed.

She had Charlie Bell move in another bed and place the two of them side by side. With Ray Genther stretched out slantwise, lying diagonally across both beds, the problem was partially solved, though a bedstand had to be placed to take care of his feet.

"I'll make out fine," Ray Genther assured her then. "Don't do any more worrying about me."

But Ivy was not satisfied. She beckoned Charlie Bell to her office, and said, "When I first came here, working down on the second floor, we had another tall patient, about six feet seven as I recall, and a bed was furnished that he could use, with a few inches to spare. I wonder where it is now?"

Charlie Bell scratched his head. "There's some beds in storage down in the basement of the old wing," he volunteered. "It might be the long bed is there. You could put through a requisition to Central Supply and have them bring it up."

Ivy snorted. "In three or four days, maybe, after making out a request in triplicate and waiting for it to go through channels! Ray Genther will be post-op by tomorrow night; he needs a proper bed for his recovery!"

Central Supply was a hard-working department of the hospital, but fussy about proper forms and procedures and inclined to be a little slow at times. Ivy fretted about the problem through the balance of the night, using it to counterbalance her concern about Toby McLarnin.

She was aware of comings and goings at Five West, of the whispers of consultations in the corridor. At around four it became quiet and she went to have a look at the boy. He was

asleep. A special duty nurse was with him now, watching the drip of a novocaine solution intended to dilate the blood vessels for better circulation, if possible. She shook her head, mouth tight, as Ivy lifted her brows questioningly, asking how it was going.

Ivy went on to the nursing station for a cup of Lotta's coffee. Lotta, hard at work, reported that the elderly nurse was lying down, resting, in a room that was not being used.

Ivy told herself she had to persuade the nursing office to find another R.N. for the arduous night duty here.

Lotta spoke about Toby McLarnin. "I heard Dr. Fodor say he was afraid it would have to be surgery, but that they'll wait as long as possible before deciding for certain," she reported.

This added to Ivy's mental strain. She scolded herself, with a reminder not to become emotionally involved over patients; there were so many of them and the wear and tear on nerves, mind and heart could become destructive.

She knew this quite well, but could not seem to help herself where Toby McLarnin was concerned. He was so likable, so genuinely nice and decent, a boy on the threshold of manhood with bright promise ahead, and what was so suddenly facing him as a result of a seemingly trivial accident was terrible to contemplate.

Ivy resolutely tried to focus on other things. She thought of Ray Genther and told herself that she was going to procure a bed for him, even though undertaking such a task was not properly part of a head nurse's job at all.

Nearing six o'clock, with her work caught up, she summoned Charlie Bell. "You and I are going to the basement," Ivy informed him. "If a long bed is there, I intend to find it!"

Trude took them down. They stepped out into a concrete corridor under the hospital lobby. It was lighted, and rather dank, with overhead water and steam pipes that were dripping some moisture. They then had to walk a considerable distance to reach the basement in the old wing, under the segment of the building where St. Vibiana's had first opened for business forty years ago.

The old wing, four stories high, was now devoted solely to childrens' wards. The basement here was used mostly for storage. It also held some rooms which, though they were not being used, were equipped to receive patients, with beds and other facilities kept in readiness. Ivy had heard the reason for this had something to do with Civil Defense.

The two of them entered another long corridor which was also lighted, though dimly, naked bulbs placed at infrequent

intervals. Ivy pointed to her left. "You go in that direction, Charlie. Look in every room, and yell if you find a long bed. I'll head the other way."

The orderly pinched his lip, looking dubious. "It's kind of dark, and no telling who might be wandering around. I'd feel easier in my mind if you'd let me go with you."

"No," Ivy told him firmly. "Start hunting, Charlie."

She began to work along the corridor, apening doors. She found a room with beds stored in it, but all of them were standard length, then two rooms that were full of cartons and boxes. For several moments she had heard Charlie Bell's footfalls and the sounds of doors opening and closing, but now it was quiet.

Ivy continued her quest, her crepe-soled shoes evoking no whisper from the cement floor. She opened another door and discovered one of the rooms that was equipped for patients—a bed, ghostly in faint light filtering through a high, ground-level window; it was made up and ready, sheets tight, hospital corners squared.

It seemed likely all of the rooms from this point on would be the same, Ivy thought, with not much likelihood of finding a long bed in any of them, and she almost turned back to seek Charlie Bell. But she decided to check one more room, and opened its door.

There was a sudden gasp, a flurry of movement—a woman, wearing only her slip, standing in front of a wall mirror over a lavatory, comb in hand, whirling to face the open door . . . Meriel Hoad.

Ivy quickly closed the door again, and went away, back along the corridor, almost running.

She heard a distant call, and moved even faster. Charlie Bell had found a bed, and was studying it grinningly as she joined him. "I stretched myself out on the mattress," he reported. "It's plenty long enough for Ray Genther, feet and all."

"Good," Ivy said. "Let's move it right up to five. You push and I'll pull."

"Why, no need for you to have to put yourself out," Charlie protested. "I can handle it fine by myself. Most of my work is moving beds!"

"Do as I tell you!" Ivy snapped.

Then she felt ashamed of herself. He was a good, willing worker, and there was no excuse for venting her churning emotions on him. Ivy made a point of thanking Charlie Bell warmly when the bed was at Five East and Ray Genther had been transferred to it.

That done, she went to her office and sat down, elbows on the desk, fingertips pressed to her temples, seeing again the scene in the basement room, with all of its leering implications, Meriel's uniform hung over a chair, along with her white stockings.

Ivy knew now that her half-formed guess, after having twice seen the blonde nurse early in the morning, must have been correct. Meriel must have spent a number of nights—and obviously not alone—in that room. There was easy access to it by a secluded stairway located on the north side of the old wing.

Thank God, Ivy thought, the man had left this morning before she had come along.

It was ridiculous and naive, she told herself, to be so upset about the matter. She was no child, to be shocked by such a discovery. Every hospital had its constant under-current of rumors concerning illicit affairs, of rooms furtively used for purposes which had nothing whatever to do with patient care. St. Vibiana's was no exception.

However, Meriel was the first person with whom Ivy had felt any closeness to have become involved in such flagrance, to her knowledge, the first to be caught at it by herself. And a question hammered at her: What was she to do about what she had seen?

"I can't tattle on her!" Ivy cried inwardly.

Should she just do nothing—?

No answer came. Maybe, she thought as she went down to the coffee shop, Meriel had not recognized her in the gray half-light and an immediate answer would not be demanded.

But she had hardly settled herself at the counter when Meriel slid onto the adjoining stool. Meriel, Ivy realized, had been waiting, watching for her. And, "Please don't turn me in!" she breathed.

Meriel was very frightened. Lipstick, shakily applied, was smeared about her mouth: She said, "I told you I might leave St. Vib's, but if I'm fired because of what you saw down there it will mean a black mark against me so I can't ever get another job."

This could be true. Nursing shortage or no, if Meriel were discharged for such a reason word would quickly get about even though the reason probably would not be stated by St. Vibiana's, and she would not have much of a future in her profession.

Why, Ivy wondered in exasperation, had Meriel not considered this possibility before indulging in such recklessness?

"The man was Conrad Boothby," Meriel went on drearily.

"Yes, I know that I also told you I was through with him. But he got at me again, with his wheedling and his promises. All of them were lies. I found out last night I wasn't the only woman he had cajoled down to—to where you saw me, a place so easy and convenient for him, and that lies are all I can ever expect as far as he is concerned. Conrad Boothby is the kind of man I always seem to get."

She tried to light a cigarette, her hand shaking. Ivy had to reach out and hold the match for her. And Meriel continued, "Well, it is completely over now! I'm really through with him this time, through with getting myself in trouble over men; that is a promise!"

"All right, Meriel," Ivy responded. She was abruptly weary of the whole grimy episode and had made her decision, whether right or wrong, as to what she would do. "Suppose we just forget all about it," she added.

But Meriel had something more to say. She muttered, "I think my trouble might be mostly that I'm alone too much; I get restless and there always seems to be some man around . . . Ivy, let me move in with you, at your apartment!"

Ivy's lips parted in astonishment. Meriel hurried on, "You're alone, too. Please let me do it!"

No, Ivy told herself.

But—did she have the right to make a brusque rejection of this harried woman's plea when, by accepting her, she might help Meriel to avoid another such entanglement, one which might lead to disaster for her?

"I'll think about it," Ivy responded.

She had said the same thing to Dick Rudd on another occasion, Ivy recalled. She had a premonition her half-promise to Meriel Hoad, just made, would be fulfilled, with the hope that the promise Meriel had made, about not becoming involved in any more trouble with men, would not be broken.

X

Ivy Anders went home and made preparations for another day's sleep with this morning's happenings still drumming in her.

She found herself considering again the suggestion that perhaps Meriel was to be envied for the fact that at least she had dared to live boldly. Meriel must have acquired a few exciting, intoxicating moments to remember, here and there in her

affairs, even the one with Conrad Boothby—whereas, for Ivy Anders, there had been no such moments at all.

Ivy snorted at this, telling herself to forget such nonsense. However, a perverse imp—or her other self, once more—seemed to whisper that she might be missing something desirable that life had to offer, and perhaps should begin to find out for sure before it was too late.

She tried to forget this, too, and devoted a little time to the effort of attempting to figure out some way to deal with Conrad Boothby. But any move against him, Ivy feared, would endanger both Meriel and the other women who were involved.

Her thoughts turned to Stan Dikestra and the strangeness of his attitude toward her.

Did Stan's behavior mean he had decided that his interest in her was a mistake—that he had concluded it would be best to see as little of her as possible during the few days before the end of his residency at St. Vibiana's?

Maybe so, Ivy thought wearily, with the discovery that she was getting a headache. She took aspirin and went to bed, slept uneasily, then was awake at two and pacing about in her nightgown. Her apartment was very hot; she felt feverish, almost ill, felt tightness in her body and the dull pounding of the headache.

She was thinking of Stan again, and of Dick Rudd, with a sense of desolation at remembrance of the man who had come into her life and then had gone out of it, a course Stan Dikestra now seemed to be following as well.

Ivy tried to put both of them out of her mind. But what else was there to think about? Not Meriel Hoad, again . . . There was Toby McLarnin, though; she had dreamed of him, a dream whose details, mercifully, she could not recall. Reaching impulsively to the phone, Ivy began to dial the St. Vibiana's number, telling herself she had to know what had been done and his condition.

She replaced the receiver with the number half-dialed, unable to go through with the call.

Toby was in good hands—the hands of Dr. Fodor and Dr. Stan Dikestra. Tonight would be soon enough to learn what those hands had probably done to Toby McLarnin by now. Ivy felt she could not take such news at this moment. And she had to sleep if she was to be in any condition to take it tonight.

An envelope in the bathroom medical cabinet held some phenobarbital tablets, about a grain and a half apiece, a fairly heavy dosage. Ivy swallowed one and returned to bed,

now to sleep heavily, without dreams, not to struggle awake again until the illuminated hands of her clock pointed to ten-thirty. Its alarm had failed to arouse her.

She dressed hurriedly and rushed down to the car without eating. The night was very warm. Ivy still had her headache, and, with it, a lethargy, a listlessness she could not seem to shake off, an oppressive weariness of both body and spirit. It was just short of eleven when she entered the hospital lobby, going to the night elevator. The indicator showed it was at the fifth floor, and several minutes passed before Trude brought it down.

The night operator was red-eyed and woeful. Ivy said crossly, "What is wrong with you?"

Trude answered unsteadily, "You haven't heard—about Sister Philomena—?"

Ivy felt her heart leap raggedly. "No. Tell me!"

"She is dying, on Five," Trude said, weeping.

Then the elevator was at the fifth floor again. Ivy, leaving it, saw several nuns standing together in the corridor on the Five West side of the building, including Sister Antonia, who had rosary beads twined between her fingers.

She was red-eyed also, and two small tears showed on her cheeks. "I know I should be feeling joy for her sake, now that she is being freed of pain and weariness," Sister Antonia confided to Ivy. "But I am losing one who has been the dearest of friends ever since I was a novice. It is septicemia, spreading like wildfire, with no resistance left in her to oppose it; she collapsed at about ten this morning, here on this floor, after having come to check on the poor McLarnin boy, and it was deemed best not to try to move her to her own quarters. Now it is far too late for that. Mother Superior is with her—"

Father Mardikian appeared at the door of 505. He wore his vestments. The priest spoke urgently, "She is asking for you, Sister. Please come quickly."

Sister Antonia hurried into the room. Ivy continued on, past the nursing station, thankful that at this moment no one was there. She went out onto the dark balcony, where she could be alone, and gripped the iron railing and bowed her head. The sense of desolation was in her again, but much stronger, seeming to scourge her.

If she had completed the call this afternoon, Ivy thought, she would no doubt have been told about Sister Philomena. She could have come to the hospital and might have been with her for a while.

To do what—? Ivy did not know. Not to comfort her, she

thought; Sister Philomena would not have required this, and more likely would have offered comfort instead. But she could have spoken to the nun, telling of admiration for her fortitude and serene purity of spirit—of a closeness which had come to mean a great deal. She had been denied all this. Now she was shaken by a strong gust of grief and her own tears began as she wept.

Too much of everything had been unloaded on her, she thought drearily, with this as a culminating blow. Perhaps even attempting to be a nurse was wrong, a too-intimate, painful involvement with everything that made up life and death.

A footfall sounded behind Ivy. A hand touched her shoulder.

"Cry," Stan Dikestra said. "I shed a few tears of my own. They tell us not to become involved, but we aren't made of stone."

"Please," she whispered. "Let me be alone, Stan—for a few minutes—"

"No," he said. "I saw you come in. It hit you hard, because you didn't know about her. I think you don't know about something else, either. If that is true, I want you to hear it from me, now, because I am afraid it will hit you hard also—as it hit me—"

Ivy stiffened, with sudden realization of something overlooked moments ago in the corridor, that Sister Philomena was in 505, where another patient had been last night. She breathed. "Toby McLarnin—?"

Stan said sombrely, "It happens every once in a while, in spite of every precaution, nobody knows why; his heart just quit and nothing we tried could bring him back. Toby died in surgery this morning, Ivy."

"Oh, no!" Ivy Anders cried, and turned blindly to Stan Dikestra. Her hands clutched at his jacket, her cheek pressed against his chest, and, as he held her, she wept without restraint.

That death had claimed the boy also seemed almost too much to be borne. Ivy wept for him, the bright spirit so briefly glimpsed that had been inexplicably snuffed out, she wept for Sister Philomena and for herself, in grief and in protest at the defeat which their passing represented.

Stan's arms were about her. He held Ivy lightly, murmuring, "Something in Toby failed him; he didn't quit—knew why we were taking him to surgery, because I told him, and he was ready to face life on one leg. Remember him that way. He didn't quit. Neither did Sister Philomena. His death hit her

hard also, but it wasn't the reason for her—her passing. She has fought death all day, as valiantly as anyone I ever knew."

Ivy realized she was feeling a little better. She sighed and said, "Thanks, Stan, for letting me cling to you. I must go, now."

The evening head nurse on the opposite side of the building was waiting to be relieved. Ivy had to get to work.

But Stan Dikestra still held her. "Ivy, I don't seem to pick very good times to talk to you. There is something I must say now, though, with no more waiting—"

His hands shook a little. And he hurried on, "You know my plans. I'll be through here in only several more days. Will you go with me when I leave?'

So—it was happening, on this dark balcony, the night sighing of the city below them, death in silent passage nearby, and, in strange juxtaposition, Ivy Anders being offered a pathway for the rest of her life, of fulfillment of her destiny as a woman.

"Yes, Stan," she answered steadily. "Of course I will."

"Thank God!" Stan Dikestra muttered.

He kissed her, displaying an awkwardness which indicated it was something he had not done very often. Then he laughed, in great pleasure and relief, with another kiss which was much better.

"I'll always love you, Ivy," he breathed.

And she would always love him, Ivy vowed to herself, with no more thought, from now on, of anything that might have been.

There ensued for Ivy Anders a swift run of days and nights, flashing past as summer waned and autumn approached, with so much to do that she had very little time to devote to such a matter as sleeping.

On that first night, after parting from Stan on the balcony, Ivy discovered in some surprise several hours later that she still had her headache but had forgotten it. By morning, the dull throbbing was gone. With it, the sense of listlessness and lethargy had vanished as well—probably, Ivy thought, because she was no longer concentrating with such exclusiveness on herself.

Two quiet funerals were planned. There was a requiem mass for Sister Philomena, which Ivy managed to attend. Then it was all receding into the past and life was hurrying on, with new patients, new problems crowding upon her. Ivy arranged a transfer of the elderly night nurse from Five West to a less exacting ward, but her replacement was not very satisfactory

either and that problem still persisted. She had a note from Mrs. Jordan, beginning her stay at the rest home.

A great deal of time had to be allotted to Stan Dikestra, for a making of many plans and of getting acquainted, of attempting in a hurry to learn a man's ways, his likes and dislikes, an interesting but frequently perplexing business for Ivy.

Stan, she discovered, did not have much interest in money or clothes or personal possessions or what was going on in the world—beyond the realm of medicine, at least; for that he had an all-consuming passion, people and their ailments and what must be done to make them well.

This was admirable, but the two of them had to live in the world, and Ivy told herself she must try to be smart, clever, must try little by little to change him and make Stan somewhat worldly, at least.

On her first day off they visited the offices to be occupied by the medical group he would be joining, taking up all of a new one-story modernistic building on the west side of the city. They were partially furnished, with equipment being slowly moved in; the group was planning to begin practice there about the middle of November. One of the other four doctors was on hand. He spoke to Ivy, "It will be great to have you here. We've been a little worried about finding good nurses for our staff."

Stan would have his own suite, consisting of a reception room, office and examination room. Ivy was to work with him, and the other doctors were hoping for her help at times as well. It appeared she would be kept quite busy.

On the occasion of that visit, the doctor spoke also to Stan, "We have been a little worried about you. It is fully settled by now that you'll come with us? No more doubts or hesitations—?"

"None," Stan responded shortly.

Something in his voice, a fleeting expression on his face, started a faint tickle of worry at the back of Ivy Anders' mind. It was remindful of Stan's previous hesitation where she was concerned, of her sense of some indefinable obstacle between them. But Stan said to her later, "The only doubt I had about joining them had to do with the request that I go to Burma."

And this also must have been the obstacle between the two of them, Ivy told herself. She could not see how there could have been anything else. After all, St. Vibiana's did not pick its residents at random but subjected them to the most searching of investigations. If there was anything at all questionable in his past the investigation would surely have uncovered it, and he would have been rejected. His time at the hospital, of

course, was an open book, a praiseworthy one. Ivy decided to do no more worrying.

She would have liked to confide to someone—to Lotta, to Benita, and to her mother—that she and Stan were to be married. But she hesitated; the time to make such an announcement still seemed somewhat distant, for Ivy discovered that Stan had not meant it quite literally when he had asked her to go with him at the time of his leaving St. Vibiana's. It would be a month or more beyond that, he felt, before they would be wed.

"I need time to clean up various odds and ends," Stan told her. "Also—well, I'll be starting out in debt to the group for my office furniture and equipment; I don't have very much money of my own. I want to work a little and earn some—through consultations, and in addition there are always jobs for a qualified anaesthetist; I am qualified. We are going to have a honeymoon, Ivy, paid for by me."

"Stan, I have some money saved. You can have it—"

"No!" he said.

She had to accept this, and felt rather proud of his decision, though Ivy could not understand why they must wait so long before being married. It seemed to her everything could be taken care of in somewhat less than a month, and she wondered briefly if there was some undisclosed reason for that waiting, then felt ashamed of herself as she rejected the thought.

That Stan was deeply in love with her and wanted very much to get married could not be doubted. If she did not feel toward him quite as she had where Dick Rudd had been concerned . . . Ivy put this firmly out of her mind also. She must forget Dick, and would, in time.

The fact that she and Stan were greatly interested in each other could not very well be concealed, especially since he was much on the fifth floor at night now and they had breakfast together every morning. Whispers were starting, Ivy knew, probably amused whispers that she, who had followed a lone path so long, was succumbing at last.

Lotta Worth gave her a speculative glance one night. "It's always the quiet ones who surprise everybody," she remarked.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," Ivy replied.

"Okay," Lotta said. "But a lot of us want in on a nice present for you two. I'm going to start collecting before long."

This was nice to hear. Ivy felt herself blushing. "Lotta, please don't—not very soon, anyway."

"Let me know when," Lotta told her. "You've donated

plenty for presents for others. I am really going to make all of them shower down!"

The one person who did know exactly what was going on was Meriel Hoad.

Meriel had renewed her plea to share Ivy's apartment. Ivy had had to tell her she would soon be leaving it—she and Stan had agreed the place would be too small for them—and the reason, while pledging her to secrecy. But Meriel still wanted to share it with her, if only for a while. "After that I can take it over and find some St. Vib's nurse to move in with me—a gray-haired nurse who will scare men away!" she said.

So Ivy gave her consent and Meriel arrived one morning with three pieces of hand luggage and a wardrobe trunk. On her first day there, Stan stopped by to see Ivy, and their demeanor told a great deal to her shrewd eyes. After his departure she confronted Ivy, laughingly. "I've been wondering if what you told me about you two was on the level; now I can see it is!" she said. "That guy is really yearning for wedding bells and orange blossoms!"

"Don't knock them," Ivy said, trying to keep the talk light. "I've heard them very well spoken of, here and there."

"Why, you have my full approval and blessing!" Meriel cried. "Speaking as one with more failures than I can remember, I'm all for any woman who can get a man to an altar. It is a knack that I certainly never acquired!"

She had something more to say, thoughtfully, after a pause, "Maybe it's because I never met the right man. The one you've picked, now—I don't know very much about him, but I think that I've got Stanley Dikestra pretty well tabbed. He is a kind who feels everything very deeply and intensely, the kind, too, who will probably be faithful to one woman all of his life. He has put you up on a pedestal, Ivy. I think that is rather nice. Somebody should do as much for me!"

For herself, Ivy was not quite sure she cared to be up on a pedestal. But it was pleasant that Stan thought of her in such a way.

Thus, the hurrying days, and all too soon the day arrived when Stan at last concluded his residency and moved out of his room at St. Vibiana's. Also, he disappeared.

A day passed with no word from him, a second, a third, and Ivy became very worried. Stan had remarked somewhat vaguely that he must find a place to live temporarily, but the hospital personnel office had no forwarding address for him. A call to the doctor of the group whom she had met was also fruitless; he had no knowledge of Stan's whereabouts. Ivy then went to Dr. Fodor.

The chief of the medical staff confessed he did not know anything, either. "Stanley is a very stable and sober young man, though. You should soon be hearing from him."

Ivy faltered, "But—possibly an accident—?"

"Yes," Dr. Fodor sighed. "I will have an intensive check started at once."

But there was no need for a check. The mail brought a post-card from Stan. It had been mailed in Idaho. On it he had written, 'I had to come here. My uncle is ill. Will be tied up for a few days. Much love, Stan.'

This was a great relief, though Ivy could not understand why he had not gotten in touch with her before leaving.

Two more days passed. Another post-card arrived. 'Will be leaving here soon,' Stan had written, 'and must then go to Nevada for a month or so. I will explain why from there.'

Nevada? What in heaven's name did this mean?

Ivy began to worry once more. She found it difficult to sleep, especially as there was a sudden heat wave, usual for September in southern California, and she had to resort to phenobarbital again.

Ivy had not mentioned the post-cards to Meriel, remarking only that Stan was out of the city for a while. Perhaps, she was to reflect later, Meriel would have come up with an instant explanation, and the right one, if she had seen the second card.

On the third night after receiving that second card, Ivy had just taken over the night's duty and was sitting at her desk, feeling harassed, oppressed by the heat and by anxiety about Stan. Then, through the glass walls of her office, which offered a view of the entire corridor, she saw him appear from the elevators and come slowly in her direction.

He was not alone. A woman was with him, hand on his arm.

Ivy went to the office door and stood there, waiting. As in the moment beside the creek with Dick Rudd, she had a sudden acute awareness of everything—the shadowed corridor, the sultry warmth, the small faint sounds of the hospital, including laughter and small talk from the nursing station at Five East, nearby, then Stan Dikestra stopping to face her, his expression a strange mixture of shame, embarrassment and resoluteness.

Ivy's heart began to thump painfully, with instinctive realization of what was to come. The young woman had stopped, several paces away. She was robust and plain, attired in a somewhat dowdy dress; her gentle features showed no trace of make-up. She glanced to Ivy, and away, biting nervously at her lower lip.

"Ivy," Stan said, his voice strained, high-pitched, almost breaking, "I—this is Rachel, my wife."

"How do you do?" Ivy said.

The plain young woman nodded jerkily, without speaking. Looking to Ivy again, deep compassion showed in her eyes.

"We have been married for more than four years," Stan said. "I wanted to tell you before; I couldn't. And I couldn't let you know now by writing—or just go away, with no explanation. I had to come back. Can I talk to you, only the two of us? It won't take long."

"Of course, Stan," Ivy said. "Will my office be all right? And perhaps your—perhaps Mrs. Dikestra would like to wait at the reception room—?"

XI

Sitting across the desk from Ivy, features tight and lined, Stan said, "We were married, in Idaho, just before I reported here at St. Vibiana's to begin my residency. And it was—impulsive, on my part, gratitude for all she, her family and their friends had done for me. Rachel said she was content to wait until I was ready to begin medical practice. Shortly after the ceremony, I went away. I didn't see her again until I returned to Idaho last week."

Ivy realized he had never told her that the people who had helped him lived in Idaho. Otherwise, his disappearance might not have been quite so strange.

She listened, feeling oddly calm and composed. Her heartbeat was normal again. Her rejection had happened, she told herself. There was nothing she could do about it, nothing left but to hear him out.

He continued, "Rachel wrote me fairly often. I replied, now and then. I had soon decided that the marriage was a mistake and should be ended, but didn't want to hurt her by saying so. I just let the matter drift, doing nothing about it."

Stan rose and began to pace, back and forth across the width of Ivy's office.

"Then I met you," he said, "with all that followed. Rachel was what was standing between us, making me hesitate. There were also the letters from the church board about the Burma hospital, which made me back and fill about joining the medical group. Ivy, I tried several times to make myself tell you about Rachel, but the words always stuck in my throat. There

never seemed to be a right time for you to hear such a thing. I made plans—that I must and would tell you, then write Rachel there must be a divorce and I would get it, in Nevada, that I would find some sort of job there, wait out the required six weeks—"

Her phone rang, a query from the nursing office which required several minutes to answer. When she hung up, Stan had moved to an open window and was looking out at the night.

"Instead, I went back to Idaho," he said. "I hadn't meant to do that, didn't want to do it. But something was driving me—not my uncle's illness, since he has been ill for several years; I did see him, though, and we parted friends. Something I could not withstand forced me to return. I thought it was a feeling that decency demanded I see Rachel in person. Ivy, I couldn't tell you I was going, and why; I kept putting that off. I told myself I would be firm when I saw Rachel, that I would say only there must be a divorce, then inform the others that I was joining the medical group in private practice and they must find somebody else for the Burma hospital. After those matters were settled I meant to go to Nevada, file for the divorce and—and still put off telling you until after it was granted."

Stan turned to face her. He was quieter now, less tense. "It was never in me to do any of those things," he said. "I know now I was forced to go back to Idaho for a purpose which I had to fulfill. I tried to fight against it, and couldn't. I could not end the marriage. It is an obligation I must carry. I could not evade the other obligation resting on me, either—"

He had returned to Idaho, had there encountered the people who had helped him to become a doctor, and the reminder of what he owed them, a debt money alone could not repay, had been something else Stan Dikestra could not put aside.

He had tried to deny his conscience, his idealism, and had failed—a failure, however, that for him had been a victory. This showed in the set of his mouth now, the light in his eyes. Stan Dikestra had found the road he must follow through life and was impatient to begin his journey. He was doggedly discharging the final obligation resting on him, this confession to Ivy Anders.

She said, "You are going to Burma, with your—wife—?"

"Yes. Rachel has always wished to undertake missionary work. We will leave next week, flying from San Francisco."

Ivy realized he must have returned here only to face her.

Stan said, "It will be a rugged life. We will be quite poor, only a nominal salary for me, and I think we will be there from now on except possibly for brief visits home, spead years apart—"

But it was what he wanted—or, more to the point, what something in him, not to be denied, was demanding, and the new office on the city's west side would be used by some other doctor. It seemed certain to Ivy he was relinquishing that with no regret.

Did he feel the same way where she was concerned? Something told Ivy he did not, that Stan Dikestra was still in love with her but that he would never betray this fact to anyone.

Stan showed a tight, twisted sort of half-smile. "Ivy, even if things had worked out for us, somehow, I feel sure that sooner or later I would have been driven to go to Burma or some place like it. You might be very lucky, never having to face the prospect of going with me!"

Perhaps he was right, but his words did little to ease the sense of loss she was beginning to feel.

And she had taken all of this she could stand, with its strain and roughness on her nerves. Ivy pushed back her chair.

Stan Dikestra, though, had something more to say. "Ivy, can you find it in your heart to forgive me—?"

"Of course," she replied. "It is quite all right, Stan."

If words made him feel any better, let them be said. Ivy wished there was someone who could say something that might ease her own desolation and pain. Telling herself she would not have wanted him at the cost of hurt to the woman he had married and that she was probably better off to be rid of this strange, moody man who had briefly walked through her life, did not seem to accomplish much good.

She moved with him along the corridor to the elevators, with Stan's wife joining them, her manner indicating these past few moments had imposed considerable strain on her as well. The plain, dowdy young wife sent a look to Ivy that showed compassion again. It also seemed to be pleading for something from her.

Ivy said, "Take good care of him."

"Oh, I shall!" the response came breathlessly, and Rachel Dikestra's eyes fixed adoringly on her husband. He would be the one up on the pedestal now, Ivy thought.

The elevator arrived. Its doors opened for them, and the last glimpse Ivy had of Stan, he was looking away, as though seeing some far scene visible only to himself.

The doors closed, they were gone, and for Ivy this fifth floor foyer now held too many memories—the shadowy figure of Dick Rudd standing only a few feet away and holding his hurt arm, also Stan and herself confronting the young hoodlums who had come to find Sebastian Cruz, and now Stan again, departing with his wife.

Ivy returned to her office, where her phone was ringing.

It was Main Admitting. "Miss Anders, we have a CVA—" brain hemorrhage, or stroke "—just brought in by private ambulance, which we are ticketing for your floor."

So life went on, with its many importunate demands for a spending of time and energy, and demanding of Ivy Anders as well that she hold her head high, her back stiff, concealing within herself the hurt she felt, the lingering emotional aftermath of her brief love affair with Stan Dikestra.

The whole hospital soon knew about him and his wife; a number of people had seen them together during their short visit, and also he had introduced her to Dr. Fodor and several others. For a period of a few days St. Vibiana's buzzed with gossip about the ex-resident and his wife, about Ivy Anders.

On the morning following Stan's good-bye, Dr. Fodor came to the fifth floor before Ivy checked out. He said, "My dear, I feel it is my fault that you had to suffer embarrassment and pain, since I heard some of the rumors concerning you and Stanley and might have acted but did not. When he applied for his residency the fact he was married appeared on his application, but, with no mention of it at any time by him, the matter had slipped completely out of my mind until last night."

Stan Dikestra's marital status had been on record all the time, then. But the hospital's personnel files were restricted, not available for Ivy to study even if it had occurred to her to check up on him. No one with access to those records had thought to warn her; perhaps the fact of his marriage had slipped out of their conscious thinking as well.

"Can you forgive an old man's forgetfulness?" Dr. Fodor begged.

Ivy assured him also that he was forgiven.

But she could not bring herself to speak of it to others—to Lotta, for instance; she hoped Lotta would understand.

And nothing was said to Meriel Hoad, but Meriel had a few thoughts to express as soon as she heard the talk at the hospital.

"I know exactly how you feel," Meriel said, "since I have been through it myself. Have I ever been through it!"

Then, moodily, she went on, "Men! You keep telling yourself there has to be one somewhere who is different, who will give as much of himself, honestly, as you are willing to give him, but I'm about past the point of believing that. Maybe the women who just grab at good times with men, not bothering about anything else, have the right idea!"

"Meriel, please, I would like to forget the whole thing," Ivy said.

"Okay, I won't mention it again," Meriel agreed.

Ivy hoped she would hold to this promise, now that it was definite they were to be together.

There was certainly nothing to complain about so far, where that was concerned. Meriel seemed very anxious to make a go of their arrangement, leaning over backward in a sense as though to assure Ivy again she could cause no more trouble.

She did not seem to be having any dates. The affair with Conrad Boothby appeared to be definitely over. Several days ago Ivy had heard with great relief that Boothby was no longer at the hospital.

So the two of them were getting along well enough, and Ivy wanted this to continue. She looked about for anything she might do which would result in an even smoother relationship.

And something occurred to her, a move which possibly could make things a little easier at the apartment. There was a slight vexation in living together to which Ivy had not given thought when agreeing to share her place. This was the fact that she was on night duty while Meriel was working the evening shift, with a consequent awkwardness in the overlapping of the time they must devote to sleeping. Ivy tentatively asked what Meriel might think about transferring to nights, while staying on Five West.

"Why not?" Meriel replied instantly. "Evenings—nights—it doesn't matter much to me. Go ahead and put it through."

Ivy made the request of the nursing office, which was a little reluctant to agree. The evening shift, beginning at three and ending at eleven, was the hardest to cover in any hospital. But a nurse who had trained in England was found who was willing to take over Meriel's place for the sake of acquiring the time in duty that was necessary before she could receive her California license, and Meriel began work on Five West at night.

It was a move which did not receive Lotta Worth's full approval at the outset, but after a couple of nights she conceded to Ivy that Meriel was doing quite well. "She's working hard, being very careful," Lotta commented. "If it keeps on, I don't think you've got anything more to worry about on this side of the fifth floor."

Ivy hoped she would be proved right.

Her own job was going smoothly. She had learned and mastered its routine; she felt confident it posed no problems she could not handle. Even the paper work was no longer formid-

able. Ivy found she could plow through it and have some time to spare on her hands.

But time to spare, she discovered, was not so agreeable. It also meant time when she could not keep from thinking of herself.

On her first night off following Stan Dikestra's act of bowing out of her life, she made her delayed visit to Benita's home, taking along presents for her exuberant young nephews, receiving a fond kiss from her amiable brother-in-law. "You don't come to see us often enough," he said. "And you're getting prettier all the time, Ivy!"

She smilingly discounted this compliment; it seemed aimed more at the new man Benita had found for her, who was also present.

His name was Roy Moulton, a neat, quiet-mannered man, apparently about a dozen years older than Ivy, and he immediately showed great interest in her. She made an effort to show interest in return during dinner, on which Benita had expended considerable effort, and she was a very good cook.

Later, while Ivy was helping with the dishes, Benita briefed her. "Roy has a good, safe job with the government, something having to do with air traffic control. He is no ball of fire, but who is? Roy is sober, he isn't stingy, and he is a kind man. Those things count for a lot, believe me!"

"I suppose they do," Ivy agreed.

"Of course there is only one thing," Benita continued, somewhat hesitantly. "He is divorced, and a lot of his pay has to go for alimony and support of his two daughters."

Which meant, Ivy thought, that there would be no question of Roy Moulton's second wife continuing to work. She would have to do so.

"I knew his wife, and she was a hell-cat," Benita continued. "She broke up their marriage. He is a pretty lonely man. He wants to get married again."

So—Dick Rudd, and Stan Dikestra, and now, perhaps, Roy Moulton—? But Ivy thought not. She found this feeling growing stronger as the evening ran along and ended, as she said good-bye to Roy Moulton, with a polite hope that they might meet again sometime.

Benita walked out to her car with her. "Ivy, what are you waiting for?" she demanded. "There aren't many really desirable men around at any time, and always a horde of young girls coming on to grab at those that are available!"

"Dear, I'm afraid you're wasting your time, trying to set somebody up for me," Ivy said.

Benita said, "I don't get it. You don't want to become an old maid, do you?"

No, she did not. But Benita, of course, did not know about Dick Rudd and Stan Dikestra, how those two had twisted and wrenched her.

Driving back to the city, she dismissed Roy Moulton from her thoughts, wishing she could also dismiss those other two. But she supposed they would be around from now on, to gouge at her again and again with hurtful memories.

She could be on guard, however, against being hurt again.

Ivy remembered how it had been at the outset, her feeling of emptiness in her life, her somewhat wistful desire that some man would come along to dispel that emptiness. Well, two men had come along, both appearing on the same night—and, she told herself, just look at what had happened as a result!

She had desired love, and love had played her false. Maybe, Ivy thought, love was only a word in the dictionary, with a false meaning as far as she was concerned. She wanted to have no more to do with it.

But without love . . . what next?

Ivy found herself suddenly remembering her training years at Mercy Hospital, and various staff nurses, unwed, middle-aged or older, who were inclined to be fussy, short-tempered, the objects of amusement behind their backs on the part of the students. They were women who had turned inward on themselves, who had reached the point where their worlds had narrowed down to the hospital and a lonely apartment or a room at the nursing home, nothing else.

Maybe this was what is in store for her, Ivy thought wryly, to grow old in a nurse's uniform. Maybe she ought to get a cat. Old maids and cats seemed to go together.

Then her time off was over, she was on duty again, and on her first night back something happened to cause Ivy Anders to change her mind completely about what the future might hold. This something was the re-appearance of Dr. Paul Farrow.

It was one in the morning, Charlie Bell had brought her the papers on a new patient, just admitted, another CVA, and Ivy was studying them. Paul Farrow, entering her office, said, "Hello! And congratulations; I have belatedly learned of your promotion."

"Thank you," Ivy responded, feeling a surprising stir of pleasure at seeing him again. "You haven't been around for a while."

"I took my family to Lake Arrowhead for a vacation, sun, swimming, and water-skiing."

"It must have done you good. That is a very handsome tan," Ivy said.

The CVA case was his patient, a man of forty who had been driving himself too hard. "Killing himself for the sake of his wife and children; there are too many of his kind nowadays—including medical men," Farrow commented. He added moodily, "We all seem to be caught in that sort of thing, and how much do those we sacrifice for really care? I often wonder. Could I look in on him?"

A private room had been ordered, and assignment had been made to Five East. The patient was sleeping, heavily. Ivy discussed possible complications with Paul Farrow, then they moved on to the Five East nursing station, poured coffee from its silex, and stepped out onto the balcony on that side of the building.

Farrow, lighting a cigarette, murmured, "So now you're a head nurse. And you will soon be moving on up—supervisor, chief nurse, hospital administrator—"

Ivy laughed. "Not that fast!" she said.

"Fast enough, I think. I have a feeling you were made for success."

"Thanks for the compliment," Ivy said.

He muttered, "I wish my future was as certain as yours."

The murmur of his voice continued, telling with candor again of his unhappiness. He had hoped, taking time out for the vacation, to gain a renewed sense of closeness with his wife, had hoped he could persuade her to recognize and accept the demands of his profession.

"I failed," Paul Farrow said. "Harriet—well, perhaps being a doctor's wife is too much for her, the long hours, the emergency calls, the fact my work must always be with me. I'm still pretty new in the city, with a practice to build, a place to make for myself, and it will be several years before I can afford to do much relaxing. I can't find a way to make her understand and accept that, though. I am afraid our marriage was a mistake; I am beginning to feel pretty much alone."

Ivy murmured sympathetically. He was unhappy, she was unhappy; they seemed to have a good deal in common.

The night R.N. on Five East came out with a question for her, while studying the two of them curiously. As she left, Paul Farrow sighed, "This place is a little too public—and both of us have other things to do."

Then, at her office again, his hand touched hers. "Ivy, will

you have dinner with me, soon, when I can talk some more—?"

Ivy hesitated. He said, "Please!" And, "Tomorrow night?"

She heard herself saying, "I suppose it will be all right. Call for me at about seven."

XII

A week later Ivy had had three dinner dates with Paul Farrow. By then it seemed obvious that he hoped for a continuing relationship with her and also what that relationship must be.

Paul began to make the situation clear on their first date, at a quiet little restaurant far from St. Vibiana's where there was not much likelihood of an encounter with anyone whom either of them might know. "There can be no divorce, Ivy," he told her. "A matter of religion is involved, and there are also the children to think about. I can't turn them adrift with only their mother to plan for their future; I simply can't end my marriage."

At the same time, though, Paul Farrow continued, he did not intend to devote any more time to the effort of attempting to win understanding and acceptance from his wife of the demands of his work. "Harriet can have the house. I will make ample provisions for her and for the children, and will see them from time to time. But I am planning to move out; I must have a life of my own."

And, Ivy realized, it was probable that Paul was going to ask her to share the new life he meant to make for himself.

She told herself he should be advised firmly, before it went any farther, that she could and would not have any part of that.

Ivy did not tell him.

She liked Paul Farrow. Perhaps it was even a little more than mere liking. To be with him was very pleasant, after the brusqueness of Dick Rudd, the abruptness, moodiness and strange compulsions of Stan Dikestra. Paul's admiration was soothing, they got along together very well, and Ivy was content for the time being to accept the relationship while assuring herself she would not let it get out of hand.

They were much alike, Paul pointed out to her. "Both of us are ambitious, with abilities to back up our ambitions. You are going to the top in your profession, Ivy. I hope to go far in medicine. I think I have it in me to accomplish the things I mean to do."

He was probably right. There was strength in him, beneath his quiet exterior, and he was a little like Stan Dikestra in that medicine was a consuming passion as far as Paul Farrow was concerned. Ivy had a feeling that this, probably more than anything else, had caused the estrangement between Harriet Farrow and her husband, that she had made a hopeless attempt to change him, justifiably fearing his work was coming to mean more to him than she did.

"We might be able to accomplish great things together," Paul told Ivy Anders.

It was a tantalizing thought, that perhaps she might work with him as she had hoped to work with Paul Dikestra.

At the conclusion of their third dinner date he kissed her goodnight, a quick, gentle kiss. Then they met for a fourth time, there were a number of kisses and Paul displayed sudden forceful insistence, an attempt to go farther which Ivy found difficult to handle.

"No, Paul," she told him. "No!"

"I'm sorry," he said contritely. "But—you are so lovely, Ivy, so very desirable; I can't help but be tempted—"

His words had a beguiling ring. Ivy felt a moment of weakness, but managed to surmount it. She said, "I don't think we should see each other again for a while, Paul."

He protested. She was firm. Then she let him kiss her goodnight. But she would not let it go farther than a kiss, Ivy assured herself, and she would not see him again until—

Until what? Ivy did not know. And she suddenly realized that even continuing to think about him was more than half an admission that her eventual answer might be yes instead of no.

Seductive whispers were beginning within her, counseling that she accept Paul Farrow, on his terms.

Meanwhile, life and her work were continuing, at an accelerated tempo. Autumn had fully arrived, with cooler weather, and the hospital abruptly began to move in its strange, rhythmic cycle toward a peak load as patients, in their mysterious manner, swarmed in. A good many pulmonary and bronchial cases were among them, probably due to the weather change, but there seemed to be no reason, as usual, for the increase also of other ailments. The fifth floor became crowded, all beds in use, and Ivy was very busy.

She was invited to attend a meeting of upper echelon personnel at the hospital, some head nurses, plus all of the supervisors and administrators. Her comments were invited concerning a volunteer aide program that was being planned to relieve the nursing load. Ivy had several ideas to offer and was asked to submit them in a paper.

This was gratifying. She had a growing sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in her job, and began to work at it even harder, only to wonder whether she was doing this in an attempt to avoid further thought about the problem posed by Paul Farrow.

Then there was a distraction, with the discovery that something seemed to be bothering Meriel Hoad.

Lotta Worth reported it to her, "There's nothing wrong with Merry's work yet, but she's fretful-like, snappish, can't seem to keep her mind on what she's doing. I don't know whether it's a man again—doesn't seem to be, at least not one here at the hospital. Merry won't tell me anything. Maybe you can find out what's wrong."

Ivy had not seen much of Meriel since Stan Dikestra's departure. This was partly due to the time devoted to Paul Farrow—she had taken care to keep her interest in him to herself, and she did not think the other woman knew about Paul—and partly due to the fact that Meriel had volunteered frequently of late to work double shifts, continuing on through the day at the end of her night duty.

Some nurses worked double shifts quite often, for the extra money. Ivy supposed this was the reason why Meriel was doing it. The result had been somewhat infrequent contact between them, even though they occupied the same bed together at least several hours each day. Now she tried to find out whether Lotta was right about feeling something was wrong, and the blonde nurse gave her a testy answer.

"I'm all right!" Meriel snapped. "I must be a little tired from working so much, but at least it means I come home, hit the sack, then get up and am right back on the job again, without time to do any thing else. And maybe that is the way I want it."

"Perhaps you ought to ease up a little, though," Ivy suggested.

"Oh, lay off!" Meriel said. "I know what I'm doing!"

Ivy told herself she had to make up her mind about Paul Farrow, and whether there were to be any more dates with him.

Perhaps, she thought, what Paul was offering her was all she was ever going to get, life in a man's shadow, but that the half-loaf of an affair with him might be more desirable than nothing at all.

After two jolting failures Ivy felt a reluctance to pursue any longer what she felt might be the twin will-o'-the-wisps called love and marriage. She felt an equal distaste for grabbing at

any man she could get, such as Roy Moulton, merely to wear a wedding ring.

She could not have Paul on a wedding ring basis. But did it make any great difference, really, if she accepted him on the basis he had all but stated in precise terms?

It could be handled discreetly. And, Ivy reminded herself, she would still have freedom, in such an affair. She could try the arrangement Paul was certainly going to suggest; if she did not like it, she could call the whole thing off.

Even if it did not work out she would have a few memories, at least, bitter-sweet perhaps but considerably more than she had been granted by the other two men who had moved through her life.

She would know what it meant fully to be a woman. Jill Mowbray's scornfully derisive charge that she did not know still rankled in her.

Thus, the thoughts coming and going in Ivy Anders' head, but she still had not reached a conclusion when she saw Paul Farrow again.

It happened on a Friday morning.

Meriel had had the previous night off, had not been around when Ivy had gone to work, and Ivy had left a note for her that she must attend another staff meeting and probably would not be home until noon. But the meeting had been postponed, and it was not quite nine when she put her Chevvy in the carport, to find Paul there waiting for her.

He came directly to the point, "Ivy, I must go north for three or four days, have agreed to do several hospital inspections in the bay area, San Francisco and Oakland, for the accreditation committee of the medical association. I am going to drive, leaving this evening."

A pause, the moistening of his lips, then he went on, "Will you go with me?"

The morning was cool and bright, they way it would probably be also this season in San Francisco, a city she loved, Ivy thought distractedly.

Paul said, "You could get the time off—?"

Yes. She had some accumulated holidays, plus unused sick leave. It could be arranged.

She could insist on separate rooms, for appearance's sake. The chance was remote that any one would ever know she had made the journey with him.

It would be the first step, but not necessarily an irrevocable one, Ivy told herself, with the reminder that she would be free to call it quits if the trip did not go well. But Paul Farrow took her hand, squeezed it tightly, and she realized that perhaps

there would be no freedom after all, that perhaps, once she had committed herself to him, he would never let her go.

"Please!" he breathed. "Say you will go with me, Ivy!"

Her throat felt very dry. She said, "I don't know—"

He looked around. "Must we talk here? Can we go upstairs?"

Paul had never been in the apartment. Ivy replied. "No. Meriel is probably there. She was off duty last night."

He frowned, touching his small mustache, obviously disturbed by this information. "I forgot about her, hope she didn't notice me waiting for you. Can we go somewhere for breakfast, and talk then—"

She had already had breakfast. But, "I—I'll have to change first," Ivy said. There was perhaps a little less danger of being noticed if she was out of uniform.

Climbing the stairs, she tried to be clear-headed, to marshal all of the arguments both for and against agreeing to what he wished, and to reach a final decision. She thought of the possibility that, once committed, she might not be able to free herself. But none of the arguments against yielding to Paul Farrow seemed to have much force. With each succeeding step Ivy was aware of a steadily increasing feeling that she had already gone too far, and the failure to say a firm no a minute or so ago meant it could not be said now.

Did it really matter so much if she never tried to say no? Was she foolish to be feeling a few lingering doubts still—?

Ivy put her key in the lock, opened the apartment's front door and walked in on Meriel and a man.

They were in the middle of the living room, laughing together. The man was a stranger to Ivy, someone big and young, black-haired, handsome. He wore trousers and an undershirt. His arm was about Meriel, who wore a thin nightgown.

It was a scene even more leeringly explicit than the one Ivy had glimpsed in the hospital basement, these two together and probably through the night past with Meriel feeling no compulsion to send him away early, since Ivy's note had said she would not be along until noon.

They stood frozen for a moment, staring at her; then both were rushing into the bedroom. A second later the man reappeared. He had grabbed up his shirt and jacket. As Ivy stepped hurriedly aside he ran through the front door and down the stairs.

Meriel appeared at the open bedroom door. She had removed her nightgown and was hurriedly starting to get dressed. "All right, you can wipe that look off your face!" she said, voice quivering, pitched high. "You're in no position to say

anything about me, not since the whole hospital knows what is going on between you and Dr. Paul Farrow!"

It had been bad enough to see what had happened in the apartment. With Meriel's bitter words, Ivy felt as though she had suddenly been hit hard in the pit of the stomach. A wave of hot nausea surged through her. She had a momentary fear that she would faint.

'The whole hospital knows—!' She and Paul had been seen together away from St. Vibiana's, then, and the whispers had started—that she was playing with fire, accepting an affair with a married man, those whispers were probably saying, with the likelihood they were adding that she had already let herself be singed.

Ivy turned away. She walked with dragging, uncertain steps to a window and looked blindly out at the bright morning.

Meriel was moving about in the bedroom, opening drawers and slamming them shut, making a furious clatter.

After a while—Ivy did not know how long it was, and in her sick numbness did not care—Meriel spoke again, behind her, now contritely, "Look, I'm sorry."

"You needn't be," Ivy said. "I had it coming."

"I don't think so," Meriel told her. "And I was all fired up, getting caught by you like that. I wanted to hurt you. What I said wasn't true. The whole hospital doesn't know. That is—well, there have been some whispers, but not very many, really, and nobody has paid much attention. You probably have more friends than you know. They have told people to shut up about it."

This hurt even more, friends who had not believed her capable of misconduct, than if the talk actually had spread. She had betrayed their trust in her, in thought if not deed, by even considering the possibility of accepting the affair with Paul Farrow.

Meriel went on, "I made you a promise, that I would cause no more trouble. Give me a little credit, I tried to keep the promise, taking on those double shifts in an effort to stay away from the guy that you saw fly out of here. It wasn't any use. And don't blame yourself; you had nothing to do with me giving in to him."

Ivy turned around. Meriel had put on a gray wool jersey suit. Her mouth curled, in mocking scorn for herself. "I was born for that kind of trouble," she said. "From now on, I'm through trying to fight against it . . . I've thrown my things in my bags. I'll send for them later, and for my trunk."

"You don't need to do that!" Ivy protested.

"Yes, I do. This sort of thing would only happen again, and

again, and sooner or later word of it would reach the hospital, with both of us in trouble. Tell them at St. Vib's that I've quit. Give any reason you like—though I hope you'll be easy on me, so I can count on a recommendation if I should need it for another job."

"Where will you go? What will you do?" Ivy asked uncertainly.

"Who knows? Maybe I'll quit nursing, and try something else. It wouldn't be much of a loss for the profession. I certainly haven't paid much attention to the oath I took when I was capped."

She was referring to the Florence Nightingale oath, required of every nurse. And Ivy flinched, with the thought she had not paid much heed to it—and its pledge of purity—lately, either.

"I'll be leaving, too," Ivy said. "I am resigning my job, going away."

Meriel stared at her. "For God's sake, why?" she cried.

Ivy could not find words to explain. It was drumming insistently in her, though, that she had let down her friends and abused the trust placed in her by the hospital. She had been guilty of wicked misconduct, accepting the dates with Paul Farrow, almost accepting the affair with him. If Meriel had sent her visitor away a little earlier it was quite possible she would have said yes to Paul by now.

Like Stan Dikestra, she had a conscience, perhaps somewhat quiescent of late but now alive and burning hotly with demands which could not be denied.

Meriel tried to dissuade her. Ivy cut the other woman short. "It has nothing to do with you. I did something wrong, and this is the only way to make it right," she said.

Ivy had no idea what her future would be after leaving St. Vibiana's. At the moment she could think only of putting herself as far as she could from the hospital and the memories it held for her.

Meriel said, "I think you're completely wrong; running away doesn't do any good. I ought to know, all of it that I have done. But maybe nothing does any good. And I have to get going."

She smiled crookedly. "I'm not chasing after the man you saw, in case you're wondering. And he isn't anybody you ever saw at St. Vibiana's, just a guy I ran into on the street one day —a guy with a suspicious wife, and nervous that she might be having him followed, so it isn't likely, after the scare you gave him, that I'll be seeing the character again. Somebody else will be along, though. That is the story of my life, always another man."

Meriel moved to the front door, hesitated there as though about to say something else, but shook her head and kept on going. Ivy had an impression her cheeks were wet.

Ivy remembered wonderingly her thought that perhaps Meriel was to be envied. Then she shook herself and went to find a sheet of white paper. She uncapped her black-ink pen and wrote out her resignation, brief words stating she was leaving St. Vibiana's at once, with regret that she could not give any notice.

The phone rang. She picked it up. Paul Farrow said anxiously, "Is something wrong—?"

Ivy started. In her emotional turmoil she had completely forgotten he was waiting for her.

He said, "I saw that man come out, in—er—a hurry. It seemed very unusual. I waited, then started to go up, but Miss Hoad left also. She was crying. I thought that under the circumstances I had better find a phone booth and call you—"

The possibility of being involved in something which might damage his professional reputation had frightened him. He could not be blamed for that, Ivy thought—and this, she told herself, was what her life would have been if she had accepted him, furtiveness and ceaseless care to pretend there was nothing between them.

"Paul, I can't go with you tonight," she said. "I can't see you again, ever."

He tried to protest. She hung up. The phone rang again, immediately. Ivy ignored it. She folded the resignation and took it down to her car, got in and started to drive back to St. Vibiana's to deliver it—the last time, she told herself, that she would be making this drive to the hospital.

XIII

Sister Antonia was in the chapel, but came to her office when word was sent that Ivy Anders wished to see her. She sat down at her plain desk, sharply studied her visitor for a moment, then picked up the resignation. Ivy waited, hand tightly clasped in her lap to keep them from trembling.

Sister Antonia read what she had written, tightened her lips and seemed to read it again, with care, before glancing up. "What is your reason for this action, Miss Anders?" she demanded.

Ivy said, low-voiced, "It has nothing to do with the hospital or my treatment here, Sister. Everybody has been very kind to me. Please just accept it, and let me go."

The nun said, "I think it may surprise you to learn that I have half-expected something like this, your desire to leave us, might happen."

Ivy started. She felt surprised and confused.

Sister Antonia sighed, removing the pince-nez which she used for reading. "My dear, after nearly thirty years of hospital work there is very little I have not seen, again and again, particularly in the relationships of patients and nurses . . . and doctors and nurses. I would be dull and insensitive—I hope I am neither—if I had not developed a perceptiveness which informs me at times when trouble is liable to develop from such relationships. You wrote this resignation as a result of your involvement with Doctor Paul Farrow—?"

Ivy's head bent. She looked down at her clasped hands. Her fingers began to writhe, and she could not control them.

Meriel had been wrong, she thought. The whole hospital must know of the ill-starred affair. Now it could destroy both Paul and herself.

There were ethical boundaries fencing in the conduct of doctors and nurses. They also governed the running of St. Vibiana's. At times those rules seemed flexible, fragile, even amusing. Then a moment such as this arrived and they became iron-hard, with a chilling reminder that the penalty for transgressing them could be brutal.

Her career and the career of Paul Farrow were at stake. Even the appearance of wrongdoing might end them.

Sister Antonia sighed again. "Ivy, I am neither inhuman nor unworldly. Please confide in me!"

It was the first time she had used Ivy's given name, which might offer a little hope. But Ivy, in mental torment, could not quite bring herself to speak. Several moments passed in deep silence.

Then Ivy looked up, to find Sister Antonia's eyes fixed steadily on her, gray eyes which seemed to penetrate to her very thoughts. Something seemed to shimmer in those eyes, pity, perhaps, or compassion—or, it might be, only the assurance that here Ivy might find a woman's understanding.

Ivy whispered, "We did nothing wrong, other than to see each other and to think of—of being together. It was more my fault than his. I could have stopped it from even starting. I did not. And I let it go on—"

Which was no excuse, she told herself. Women had spoken

of being tempted since the dawn of time, but they were never let off from having to pay for yielding to temptation.

"He was so very unhappy," she said.

"I know," Sister Antonia agreed. "Whispers have reached me about his marriage. And you have been unhappy too, I think. Dr. Stanley Dikestra's departure from St. Vibiana's, and the way it happened, came to my notice, also."

Ivy flinched at this reminder that the hospital now held too many hurtful memories for her. She said, "Sister, just let me go, and please don't penalize—Paul. I am leaving the city. I will not see him again. It is all over."

Sister Antonia studied her penetratingly through several more moments. Then she nodded, as though accepting Ivy's statements, but said, "I am afraid I cannot agree so readily to what you wish to do.'

Ivy felt her heart sink. She tried to brace herself for what would come next. It could not be less, she feared, than dismissal from the nursing staff for herself—to be fired—and a denial to Dr. Paul Farrow of St. Vibiana's facilities for his patients. And to be deprived of hospital accreditation could be a mortal blow for any physician.

The nun said, "My faith teaches that for every wrong act, in thought or deed, some penance or payment must be made. It is not for me to decree a penance for you. I can only suggest what I feel you must decree for yourself, that you withdraw your resignation and stay on your job here."

Ivy stiffened, in astonishment which quickly became dismay. She gasped, "I can't—!"

"I know it will not be easy," Sister Antonia continued. "You will have to see Dr. Farrow again. The duties of both of you will require that, and you must withstand the temptation he will represent, the pleas he may offer. You will have to accept for a while the whispers behind your back about you two, and ignore them, and go on. Strength will be required of you, Ivy. If—if you still say no, I will accept your resignation and you may leave, with our best wishes."

Ivy's head bent again. She found herself suddenly remembering what Meriel had said, that running away never did any good.

If she were to run, the memories would go with her. She could never escape from them. If she was to find a way to live with those memories, and with herself, Ivy realized, that must be accomplished here, where everything had happened.

She said, almost inaudibly, "I will stay."

Sister Antonia breathed hard in great relief. She tore up the resignation. "I am so glad. You are needed, very much." Then,

as though to change the subject and relieve the tension further, she commented, "I understand Miss Hoad is now living with you."

Ivy shook her head. She told of Meriel's decision to quit, but without mentioning the reason.

Sister Antonia's firm features showed an expression of sadness. "I am sorry to hear that. While not knowing the exact extent of her difficulties here, and hoping they might not be what Mother Superior and I feared, we tried to help as best we could. Conrad Boothby was quietly asked to leave the hospital, though not solely because of a possible entanglement with Miss Hoad. He was causing difficulties for several women on the staff. If Miss Hoad should wish to return, I will be glad to do all I can to reinstate her."

She pushed back her chair, as though nothing remained to be discussed. Ivy said hesistantly, "Sister, I—I hope there will be no action against Dr. Farrow—"

Sister Antonia paused. "The only action I contemplate is to offer prayers for him and for his wife, for their children, in the hope they may find some solution of their difficulties. Not that Paul Farrow will escape having to pay for what he has done—"

She studied Ivy Anders again thoughtfully, then concluded, "I have a feeling you will find that penance is required of him also, and that it is a very heavy one."

So Ivy went on once more, head high, back stiff, aware for a time, as Sister Antonia had warned, of whispers behind her. This was difficult to take, as was her silent, empty apartment. Ivy drove herself hard, in an effort to keep from brooding. She felt very much alone in the effort she must make, with moments when it seemed she could not see it through.

Lotta Worth helped a little, with a murmured comment, "Those that matter are sticking with you. The others don't count."

This was heartening. But Ivy was haunted by fear that when she encountered Paul Farrow again it would all be too much to take and she would have to quit. For several days he made attempts to get in touch with her; she refused to accept his calls.

Then the encounter happened. Another of his patients was admitted to the hospital and assigned to the fifth floor, and Ivy must confer with him. He came to her office. They were being watched from the Five East nursing station, she knew, and talk would quickly flash through the hospital about their meeting.

Paul had a tired, drawn appearance. They conferred in a formal, wooden fashion about the patient, a woman who was suffering from gastric upsets, probably gallstones, with questions about diet and treatment, Ivy making notes as Paul gave the answers.

His attention was fixed on her with aching intensity. She avoided looking at him while she was making the notes, managing to keep her hand and voice steady. But the moment came when there were no more questions to be asked, when Paul whispered, "Ivy—?" and she must force herself to look up at him, standing beside her desk.

There was temptation again, undeniably so, and a whisper within Ivy which spoke again of unhappiness, of the way which still could be taken to appease it. Perhaps Sister Antonia was wrong, with her talk of penance; perhaps the world's judgment was only hypocritical—

But Ivy remembered Meriel. Flouting convention had not brought Meriel happiness. It could bring Ivy Anders nothing, either, save regret and despair.

"No, Paul," Ivy said gently.

For a second a fleeting expression showed on his face which told her a great deal.

She saw relief, first, and realized Paul had not really meant his plea. He had been goaded by temptation also, reaching out again to something he knew could be disastrous for both of them, unable to restrain himself and now glad that Ivy's firmness meant their affair was wholly finished.

At the same time, Ivy saw something else in his manner and in his eyes, something which told her Paul Farrow greatly regretted everything that had happened. Ivy read guilt also in the man—at what he had almost done to his marriage, she thought. He could not shake it off. She had a feeling it would be with him for some time to come.

Sister Antonia had been right. Paul Farrow was doing penance also, and the burden which had been laid on him was a heavy one.

Ivy watched him leave, walking slowly away along the corridor. She, too, felt relief, that this was now in the past, that they could meet again, and pleasantly, with no danger either of them would be tempted again. The hardest part of the obligation she had accepted had been fulfilled.

Not that it made things much easier. Looking ahead, Ivy could not feel there was anything in store for her, other than her job and the emptiness of the hours when she was away from it.

She had had no more than that before, of course, but now

there was a difference, accentuating her loneliness. Three men had passed through her life, each in his way stirring hope she could share that life with him, but all she had gained from those experiences were the bruises and hurtful memories.

Now there was no one, and Ivy shrank from the thought of trying again, on any basis with any man. Perhaps there was something about her which meant she would always lose in the strange, baffling and complex business called love. Ivy was beginning to believe this, at least.

Several more days passed. Then, coming home one morning, she found two men waiting for her. They displayed badges which identified them as police officers. One was named Barton; the other was Schmidt.

The reason for their visit was Sebastian Cruz. There had been another of the gang battles at the Flats, between the Toros and the Knights. Cruz had been involved. He had been injured again, according to reports reaching the police, and they were trying to find him.

"I don't know why you should come to me," Ivy said, after admitting them to the apartment. "I haven't seen Cruz since the day he walked away from St. Vibiana's."

"According to our information, he received treatment from someone after that happened," Barton told her. "We thought that perhaps he or his girl might have gotten in touch with you—"

"They didn't," Ivy replied. "And if they had I wouldn't have dreamed of doing anything other than to advise that he return to the hospital, at once."

"Well, we hear that he took quite a beating in this latest fight, which happened last night," Schmidt remarked. "Cruz can't be in very good shape. We are trying to locate him in a hurry for his own good."

He hesitated, and went on, "Also, we are a little worried about something else, that those Toros might figure you have been helping him and would know where he is hiding out, with the possibility they might try something against you."

Ivy discounted this possibility and almost said so, but she recalled the bold move of the Toros against Cruz at the hospital. "I—I hope you're wrong," she replied.

Barton said, "We don't have men available right now to furnish you with police protection for a while, just in case. Will you call in immediately if you notice anything suspicious?"

She promised that she would. They started to leave. And Ivy asked a question which she could not withhold, trying

to make it very casual, "Is Sergeant Dick Rudd working on this case, also?"

Schmidt replied, "No. He was been transferred downtown, to headquarters. And Rudd isn't a sergeant any longer. He made lieutenant a couple of days ago."

So Dick had taken his step up the ladder. Alone, Ivy paced for several minutes before going to check the phone book. Then she dialed the number of the police building, downtown.

Lieutenant Rudd was on duty, Ivy was informed, but there was some difficulty in locating him. She waited, heart beginning to thud painfully in her breast as she anticipated hearing from him.

Ivy spoke quickly, when he came on the line, "Dick, I just learned of your promotion and had to let you know how happy I am for you."

"Thanks, Ivy," he replied. "It is very nice of you to take the trouble to call."

He was pleasant, cordial enough, but it did not seem to Ivy, from the tone of his voice, that Dick Rudd's heart could be doing any pounding at unexpectedly hearing from her.

For a second it was on the tip of her tongue to remark that she had received a promotion also. But no good would be served by telling his this, she decided; it would only underscore the disagreement which had driven them apart. Instead, Ivy mentioned the visit of the two police officers.

"That was done at my suggestion," Dick responded. "I didn't think you would know anything of Cruz' whereabouts, but it seemed to be a lead that should be checked out."

He also knew of the fact that no men were available to keep a watch on her for a while. "Please be very careful, Ivy."

"I will," she promised.

Both of them fell silent. There seemed nothing more to be said; still, Dick started to speak, perhaps to say good-bye, but Ivy forestalled him, "Dick, I would like you to know—"

"Just a moment," he interrupted. "I'm wanted on another phone."

There was another brief silence before Dick spoke again, "I have been summoned to a meeting upstairs, and must run. Ivy, thanks again for calling. So long."

She heard a humming on the line, and slowly hung up.

What was the something else she had started to say? Only words, Ivy told herself, that would have covered the same ground they had been over before, that she wished him well, again, and hoped he would find a girl who would be more amenable to his wishes. Such talk would not have served any

purpose, either; it was probably a good thing she had been given no chance to say them.

Ivy said aloud, "That is definitely the finish. You're through with all men, from now on!"

Her alter ego, silent for quite a while, came awake for a moment to whisper, "You're starting to talk to yourself again."

"Who cares?" Ivy said wearily, and went to bed, there to lie awake for hours, wondering if a time would come when her heartache would ease.

Then, driving to work that night in smoky autumn darkness, she realized that she was being followed, headlights swinging in behind her as she left the carport, continuing all the way to the narrow street which led to the hospital and on along it almost to the brightly illuminated ambulance entrance at St. Vibiana's. Watching in her rear-view mirror, Ivy saw the headlights suddenly drop back; the trailing car stopped and let her continue on.

It was somewhat frightening. Putting her Chevvy in the parking lot, Ivy hurried toward the hospital, across the street which it faced. There was light at the head of the long ramp leading to the lobby entrance, which spread toward the street, and light reflected from the parking lot, but the street and the shrubbery about the building held many dark shadows, and her flesh tightened at the thought of someone stepping out to confront her.

It did not happen. She reached the fifth floor without incident, breathing a little hard, and called the police as she had promised to do. A night desk sergeant took her report and promised it would be checked out. So much for that, Ivy told herself, not now quite sure there really had been someone following her.

The news about Cruz had reached the hospital, and Sister Antonia appeared to discuss it briefly. "There is general agreement on the medical staff that, considering his previous injuries, the young man is liable to die if he is not found for immediate treatment. We are trying to help in finding him, but there is little we can do, other than to alert the various parishes in this area in case a priest is summoned for him. By then, of course, it may be too late. Miss Anders, do you know anything at all that might help—?"

Ivy said she did not.

Later, past two in the morning, she noticed Charlie Bell idling about in the corridor, eyeing her through the glass walls of her office. Ivy went to the door to speak to him.

"Charlie, if you don't have anything to do on the floor, go down to A.R. They can always use additional help."

"No, ma'am," Charlie responded firmly. "Sister Antonia told me to keep an eye on you all night. I'm going to do it."

Ivy felt touched by this display of concern for her; Sister Antonia did not intend that another possible intrusion by youthful hoodlums should go unhindered. But she also felt wryly amused, studying the orderly's slender, dapper figure. "Charlie, what on earth could you do if somebody did show up and try to make trouble?"

"I could yell," Charlie Bell said. "I would, too. I'd wake up the whole hospital."

However, the night passed without incident. Morning brought word that the search for Sebastian Cruz was still fruitless.

Ivy attended another staff meeting. She was home by eleven and in bed shortly thereafter, but was up at four and moving about; she sat on the step-stool in the kitchen, toes against the linoleum, unable now to sleep for a reason which had nothing to do with her own personal problems.

Sebastian Cruz and Jill Mowbray and their dilemma had brought her awake. Ivy thought of that forlorn pair, waifs of the streets; she told herself it was no concern of hers what might happen to them. Cruz was in a situation which he had brought on himself by leaving the hospital. The police had the job of trying to find him, and they were no doubt a great deal more competent at doing that than she was.

So let them do it, Ivy told herself.

But memories of those two nagged at her—of Jill Mowbray, faithful to Cruz, all the girl had in the world to cling to, and of Cruz himself, who had felt Ivy Anders might be in danger because she had ordered the three intruding Toros away that night, and who had taken steps to protect her when she had to walk alone along a dark street.

Also, he had been her patient.

Did this mean she had a responsibility to do something in the attempt to find and aid him? Ivy did not know. But nursing was all an acceptance of responsibility, she reminded herself, and if she could help him, she must, or not be worthy of the pin she wore.

Darkness came early. At a little past seven Ivy went downstairs, in her uniform, and headed toward the carport.

Approaching her Chevvy, she noticed someone standing on the walk, perhaps half a block away—a man, she thought, who suddenly ducked aside, into a doorway.

Ivy stopped short. She called, "Do you want to talk to me? If so, come and do it!"

There was no response, no further sign of movement. She got into her car, backed it onto the street and started to drive, toward the Flats.

Again she watched her rear-view mirror. And again headlights appeared behind her, following along at a distance of about a block.

With one eye on the mirror, Ivy made a right turn at a corner, speeded up, made another turn, then slowed down a little. And the headlights appeared again, rushing after her but slowing down also, maintaining that distance of a block behind her car.

This time there could be no doubt about it. She was being followed.

XIV

Ivy set herself to lose the pursuing car. She headed for a cross-town thoroughfare where traffic was heavy, and darted in and out of the stream of cars there; she watched the signals, managed to get past one just as it was blinking red and made a fast turn onto a drive that wound through a park, past a lake bordered by tall feather-duster palms. Coming out of the park on its far side, she checked her rear-view mirror again and saw no trailing headlights now.

What had it meant?—one or more of the Toros, set to watch and follow her, in the hope she would lead them to Sebastian Cruz? Ivy supposed so. She could think of no other explanation.

Driving on, she came within minutes to the Flats, twenty square blocks or so spread out about the base of the hill where St. Vibiana's stood, tall and white in the night, with the narrow, dark streets, the equally dark houses that were crowded together.

Ivy had told herself that Cruz was probably hiding in this area. But there was so much of the Flats, something like a town in itself, people of an alien tongue and blood huddled together here in the heart of the city. She did not know where to begin.

Then, with a glimpse of a small grocery store that was still open for business, Ivy realized there was a way to make the

try at finding him. Wherever Cruz might be hiding, he must eat; somebody must be procuring food for him—Jill Mowbray, if the guess was correct that she was hiding with Cruz.

Ivy stopped and went into the store, a crowded place, strings of chili peppers, gourds and sausages hanging above a counter. A man who wore an apron stared in astonishment at her uniform, at her. She said, "I am from St. Vibiana's; I am looking for Sebastian Cruz. He is sick and needs help. Do you know where he is? Or Jill Mowbray—?"

A fleeting quiver of the storekeeper's cheeks indicated he recognized the name of Cruz, at least. But he spread his hands, muttering, "No speak English."

Ivy snorted unbelievingly at this. And one could not work at St. Vibiana's without acquiring a smattering of the language used by many of its patients. She said, "Sebastian Cruz—*enferma! Donde es?* He is sick. Where is he?"

The man was backing away, obviously frightened now. *"Por favor!* Please go!"

He disappeared at the back of the place, leaving her alone. There was probably some reason for his fright, Ivy supposed; the arrogant contending gangs of young toughs no doubt had this whole area afraid of them. Returning to the Chevvy, she drove on, continuing along the street, then presently turning back on another street. She found another store and went in there, with the same result.

There were also small bars, dimly lighted, and she tried them as well, receiving shrugs and head-shakes. The name of Sebastian Cruz was well enough known, from the reactions when it was spoken, but no one would tell her anything.

Perhaps no one cared what might happen to him, Ivy thought, figuring it good riddance if he should die.

She glanced at her watch. Time was moving along; it was past nine o'clock now. She was growing weary, with a long night still ahead of her, she had worked from the southward, toward and past St. Vibiana's, and was now about two miles beyond it to the north. Ivy was tempted to abandon the fruitless search.

After all, she reminded herself, the police had no doubt gone through the Flats with care, making a thorough search. They had not come up with anything. How could she hope to succeed?

Approaching another store, this one on a corner, Ivy stopped, lighted a cigarette and debated with herself whether she should bother making a last inquiry there.

She had tried. Wasn't this enough to appease her feeling

that she must do something, make an effort to find and help one for whom she felt a burden of responsibility?

Then Ivy sighed, stubbing out the cigarette and leaving the car. Her conscience had given the answer; it could not be enough until she had tried at every place she could find, had exhausted every possibility. And blast having such a conscience anyway, she thought, but there was no use fighting against it.

She tried the store on the corner and drew another blank. Ivy returned to the car and drove back to the first place where she had tried, ready to start again, to retrace her steps and keep at it as long as she could.

The lights were out at the first small store as she approached, and the man she had seen before was closing the front doors, locking up for the night. He gave her an angry, frightened look and started to back away. Ivy bore down on him relentlessly. "You're going to talk to me," she said, "about Cruz!"

The storekeeper sent a harried look along the street. "You hadn' ought to be here, asking everybody questions," he muttered, either forgetting his claim not to speak English or else feeling it did not now matter. "Women don' go out on the Flats at night."

Ivy said angrily, "Why don't you all get together and do something about the hoodlums who bother you?"

"We try. It don' do any good, and only means troubles. I get my windows broken, maybe, and also get beat up, if anybody sees me even talking to you."

"Then tell me what I want to know, and I'll leave you alone! Where is Cruz?"

"Por Dios, I don' know—!"

But he caught himself, then went on, in a whisper, "Fi' minutes ago, maybe less, his girl was here, wanted food but broke. I gave her some milk, eggs. She went that way." And he pointed, westward.

Ivy drove a block, another block, without sighting anyone. She began to feel the storekeeper had lied to get rid of her.

Then she saw the girl on the walk to her left, hurrying bare legs and fearful features that turned toward the car. Ivy stopped it and scrambled out, leaving the motor running, rushing toward her. "Jill! I'm Miss Anders—"

The girl had started to dodge back, the way she had come. "Go away!" she said, a hoarseness of deep strain in her voice. "Leave me alone!"

"No," Ivy said. "You're going to take me to Cruz."

"So the cops can grab him? Like hell I will—!"

Ivy got both hands on Jill Mowbray's arms. She shook her, hard. "Would you rather let him die?" she demanded.

"He won't!" Jill cried. "I told you before, Sibby's got too much guts, he's going to make it . . ."

But her voice trailed off and she began to sob, a forlorn figure in her desperation and fear. "I—I've tried to tell him it's no use, that he's getting worse instead of better. He won't listen to me—"

Ivy put an arm about her. The girl was shivering. "I'll take care of everything," Ivy said. "Come on, Jill. Tell me where to go."

She helped her into the car, drove westward another half-block and turned, at Jill's direction, onto a rutted dirt alley where it was very dark, with barely enough room for the car.

Jill Mowbray whispered, "If the Toros spotted you, and follow us—"

"I've been watching. Nobody has spotted me."

"How can you tell, for sure? Those Toros are smart. They might have seen you, in that uniform, and laid back, hoping you'd lead them right to Sibby . . . This is as far as your car can go. We've got to walk, now. Turn off your lights, or somebody is liable to notice them and come to take a look."

They moved on, another few yards. Jill muttered that Cruz was in a shed where someone had formerly kept chickens. She had helped him there, after the fight with the Toros; there had been nowhere else to go. "We knew the places where we had stayed before would be watched."

Ivy said, "You two have been all alone? What happened to the others in his gang, the Knights?"

The others had been badly mauled in the fight of two nights ago, Jill replied, and had scattered. She did not know where any of them were, and had feared to try to find out. Tonight was the first time she had been out of the shed; police had searched the area twice, forcing her to stay hidden, with Cruz.

The girl went ahead of Ivy, shoving at a door which squeaked as it opened. There was even thicker darkness, and a smell which made Ivy put a hand over her mouth and nostrils for a second.

"Sibby, it's me," Jill whispered shakenly, and struck a match.

Ivy saw Cruz, huddled on the ground, a strip of dirty tarpaulin under him, saw his eyes, fever-bright, fix on her and spark dimly, with feeble anger. Cruz, on his side, was bent like a tightly-drawn bow, knees drawn up and both hands to his middle. He wore trousers and a shirt.

Sending a quick look about, Ivy remembered Stan Dikestra's prediction there would be grime and filth in any hideout these two could find, but this was worse than anything, probably, that Stan could have envisioned.

The match flickered out. Ivy settled to one knee beside Cruz. "Jill, give me some light," she said.

The girl struck another match. Cruz muttered weakly, "Get away from me! I'll make it—okay—"

His features showed fresh livid bruises from the latest fight, plus a raw, open cut alongside his mouth. Ivy touched a palm to his forehead and withdrew it from fiercely pulsing heat. "Turn on your back and straighten out," she ordered.

"No—!'

She shoved. He was too weak to oppose her. Ivy pulled his shirt open. The St. Vibiana's bandages were gone. A clumsy makeshift had been attempted, strips of cloth, probably provided by Jill, Ivy thought, from a torn-up slip. She gently worked at shifting those strips, though their streakings of dark red and ugly yellow told their own story; she had a look at his abdominal wound and bit her lip.

The stitches had been removed from the cut, and it had started to heal but was open again, the fragile new flesh ruptured in the fight of two nights ago. It was draining. And the area of the cut itself showed an angry hue, a mingling of purples and reds, which told starkly of poison burning in Sebastian Cruz.

Jill whispered, "We got a fellow to look at it, after Sibby left the hospital. He claimed he was a doctor, pulled the stitches out and gave Sibby some stuff to take. It helped some; it seemed like Sibby was going to be all right—"

An unlicensed quack had probably given him penicillin lozenges, Ivy suspected. And Cruz might have recovered if he had waited a little longer before trying to strike back at the Toros.

Standing again, Ivy said, "Jill, he has a high fever, and there is infection in his abdominal cavity—peritonitis, I'm afraid. I'll find a telephone somewhere and call for an ambulance—"

But she caught herself. The minutes spent looking for a phone and attempting to give directions, then waiting, Ivy realized, might be fatal for Sebastian Cruz.

Using his elbows, he pushed himself up a little, with great effort, and whispered, "I'm not going back to that hospital!"

"Yes, you are," Ivy said. "And we are going to take you, in my car. We must move fast; every minute is going to count."

She turned to Jill. "It is up to you and me to get him there. Help me pull him to his feet."

"I said no!" Cruz told her. "I'll make it . . . get on my feet again, all by myself. You'll see! So will—the Toros—"

He looked to Jill. "You and me—we'll have the kicks again, babe. We don't need anybody. Get rid of this nosey dame! Then help me clear out of here—"

"Oh, shut up," Ivy said. "The only kick in store for you is to die if something isn't done quickly. Jill, help me."

The match held by Jill Mowbray flickered out. The girl made no sound, no move.

Ivy said, "I'll do it myself, then. Don't stand in my way!"

She bent to grope for a hold on the arms of Sebastian Cruz, with furious determination to drag him to her car, if necessary.

He struggled weakly against her. And he was too heavy; she could not handle him. Then a match flickered again, to show fresh tears on Jill Mowbray's face.

"I've got to help her, Sibby," the girl said.

Cruz glowered, lines deep in his haggard features. "You'd turn me in?—let the cops grab me—?" he muttered incredulously.

"Yes. You're all I ever had, and I want it to stay that way," Jill replied unevenly. "But even if you hate me, never let me see you again—I've got to help her—"

Jill blew out the match and came to bend beside Ivy. Cruz struggled against both of them, writhing in the dark, flailing weakly, but somehow they got him up, each with an arm about her shoulders, and through the door, with staggering, nightmarishly slow progress toward the car, which seemed a mile away.

His feet dragged. He was almost a dead weight, almost too much for them to manage. Cruz moaned, then exclaimed bitterly in Spanish, his voice loud in the quiet night, and tried to break away. All of them fell, together, in an awkward heap. Ivy heard a ripping of cloth and realized her uniform had been torn.

She said, "Get him up again."

They reached the car somehow and shoved him onto the front seat. He sagged sideways and down, cheek against the cushion. Ivy had to push him into a sitting position before she could slide under the wheel. Jill crowded in on the other side and took Cruz in her arms.

Ivy felt soiled, disheveled, and there was stabbing pain in her side where she had fallen. These were matters to be ignored; she could not turn the Chevvy around, must con-

centrate on backing it along the narrow alley to the street, with a sense of iciness at the thought someone might be waiting, to stop them.

But there was no hindrance and she managed to get free of the alley, then turned eastward, toward the avenue where the bus line ran, afraid of losing time if she tried to reach St. Vibiana's by a short-cut through the maze of narrow streets.

Would this expenditure of time and effort do any good? Was Cruz worth it? Ivy wondered, wearily; she had become very tired.

Then she heard him speak to Jill Mowbray, voice weak and fading, "I treated you wrong, babe, always meant to do something about it, but didn't—

"Sibby, don't try to talk," Jill begged.

But he said, a little more strongly, "I want a priest—not to help me check out but to make things right—you and me—"

Jill gasped, "We're being followed!"

Ivy's harried glance leaped to the rear-view mirror. She saw headlights, rushing after them and closing fast.

Her foot bore down heavily on the accelerator. The Chevvy streaked through a stop-sign at the avenue and into a skidding left turn, barely missing a car whose horn blared angrily. Without slackening speed, Ivy headed north now, with four blocks to the bus stop and the street leading to St. Vibiana's.

The headlights made the turn, also. The pursuing car had lost a little ground, but picked up speed, closing on them again.

"It's the Toros," Jill said drearily. "All they want is to get at Sibby for just a moment. They're going to head us off, make us stop."

Not if she could help it, Ivy promised herself grimly, and drove faster. The Chevvy was doing seventy, and shaking violently. There was, thank heaven, not much traffic on the avenue. The bus-stop corner rushed at them. She hit the brakes and made another wide turn, tires screaming, into the narrow side street, slammed a curb joltingly and bounced away from it, straightened out and picked up speed again.

Now there were only three blocks to go, with the ambulance entrance at the hospital visible ahead, like light at the end of a long tunnel. But the pursuing car swung through a wide turn also and was coming on fast, half a block behind, then a quarter of a block.

Ivy drove in the middle of the street, with an inward vow the other car was not going to get past her. She looked

ahead. They were into the last block; there was no way they could be stopped.

Then headlights appeared before them, a car coming around the hospital corner and approaching. Ivy had to swing aside a little so it could go by.

The approaching headlights abruptly swerved and drove directly at her car.

Jill screamed. Ivy whipped the Chevvy's steering wheel; the car went over a curb, a sidewalk, and slammed head-on into a tree, with a thunderous crash of metal crumpling, of glass breaking.

The door on Ivy's side sprung open. She was thrown clear, hit the ground hard and rolled over twice, uniform skirt tangled about her legs.

Struggling up, half-dazed, new pain in her and finding it hard to breathe, she saw the Chevvy's hood had sprung open also, that water was geysering from its smashed radiator. She saw, too, that the car which had run her off the street had stopped. Dark figures were leaping from it, three or four of them.

The pursuing car had stopped as well and somebody was scrambling out, with an arm lifted, pointing at the sky. She heard Dick Rudd shout, "Hold it, all of you!"

The gun he held crackled explosively, to back up his command. But one of those dark figures came running in a crouch at the Chevvy, in what Ivy realized was a boldly reckless attempt to reach Sebastian Cruz. And Jill had said it, all they wanted was to get at him for a moment.

This one held a knife; Ivy saw it glitter, in reflected radiance from Dick Rudd's headlights. She lurched to get in his way, gasping, "No! I won't let you—!"

The furious swing of an arm hurled her aside. She spun around, and fell, with a second of protesting anger that here at the last she had failed. Then something seemed to brush her head, and Ivy Anders plummeted into nothingness, all of her senses snatched from her.

XV

Returning to consciousness was a slow and laborious effort, a groping of her way through a thick bank of gray fog. This seemed to go on for some time before she could manage to open her eyes, blinking painfully at light in a room which she recognized instantly as 505 at St. Vibiana's.

Muttering, Ivy tried to push herself up, to get out of the hospital bed. Something seemed to be wrong with her right arm, and her head felt unsteady, as heavy as a lead ball, but with recollection of all that had happened Ivy told herself there were things she must do, at once.

A hand firmly pressed her back. "Lie still, Miss Anders."

An R.N. was bending over her, one of the day nurses on Five West. Ivy demanded, "What are you doing here at night?"

The other nurse smiled. "Night? It is nine o'clock in the morning."

And so it was, Ivy realized. Sunlight was filtering between the drawn slats of shutters at the windows.

She did not understand this. It increased her sense of urgency. Ivy struggled against the restraining hand. "Let me up!"

"You are still too sedated even to make it to the door," the nurse said. "Be a good patient, now. I'll give you your bath, then you can have some breakfast."

"I don't have time for any bath—!"

But it appeared she was going to get one, anyway. And Ivy discovered her right arm was in a sling.. She said, "Is it broken?"

"No. Only your collarbone," the R.N. said, briskly beginning to use a sponge.

She tried to sit up again. "I can't stay here! Sebastian Cruz—!"

Ivy sank back, feeling very giddy. Also, there had been a stab of pain in her right side, which she discovered was taped up—two cracked ribs, the R.N. informed her.

Ivy put a hand uncertainly to her head and discovered a half-cap bandage there. She had suffered a fairly severe concussion, the R.N. said, but seemed to have escaped a fracture. "There was a cut; they had to take four stitches."

"My hair!" Ivy wailed, instantly certain most of it had been shaved off.

"The cut was back of your ear," the nurse said. "Dr. Fodor handled it himself. You look fine. Well, there are some bruises on your face, but you don't need to worry about them."

The R.N. did not know anything about Sebastian Cruz. She used a towel. "I'll send in your breakfast now."

"I want to talk to somebody!" Ivy said. "Let me have the phone!"

"No. The orders are that you are to be quiet. Miss Anders, please don't be difficult. I have a high ward count, and am shorthanded today. You should know what that means."

Ivy did know, but still she fretted. Then an aide brought in her breakfast, a poached egg, milk toast and a little custard, all of which she thoroughly disliked. "Who put me on a bland diet?" Ivy stormed. "I won't eat it!"

"My goodness, you are about the most rambunctious patient we ever had," the aide said. "Please, Miss Anders?"

"Oh, all right," Ivy said crossly, and allowed herself to be fed. She submitted to taking several sips of warm water.

The aide did not know anything either, except that the whole hospital was buzzing with talk about Ivy Anders. "Like a hive of bees," she confided, "and a lot of people want to see you. I expect that, now you're feeling better, they'll start to come in before long."

"Then do something about my face!" Ivy gasped, instantly in a panic at the thought of facing any visitor as she was.

Particularly Dick Rudd . . .

The aide applied lipstick and a touch of powder, and let her look at herself in a mirror. Ivy winced. Her face was more than a little bruised. In her own opinion she looked like a hag.

The aide also displayed Ivy's uniform. It was ripped down the front, grass-stained and dirt-grimed, beyond any further use.

Then her first visitor appeared, Dr. Fodor, walking in to look her over severely. "Young lady, I hear you are being difficult. Is that any way to re-pay all of the trouble you caused us?"

Ivy felt abashed; Dr. Fodor was obviously tired, and had probably sacrificed his rest to see her. But— "Please tell me about Sebastian Cruz!" she begged.

"Yes. Well, we worked on that young scoundrel in surgery for several hours last night. He is now down on the main floor, very much under guard—and it is still touch and go with him, though I have a feeling that his toughness means

he will probably survive. Thanks to you, I might add—very much thanks to you! His—ah—girl friend is camped outside of his door. She refuses to leave."

Dr. Fodor went on, telling how Ivy had reached St. Vibiana's. Dick Rudd had brought her, in his arms.

The sound of Ivy's car crashing into the tree, followed by Dick's shot and the wailing of a siren as a police cruiser rushed to the scene, had sent a mixed group of internes, nurses and orderlies hurrying from the hospital to investigate. They had moved Sebastian Cruz to the admitting room. But Dick Rudd had insisted on carrying Ivy himself and had not left until assured she was all right.

She felt herself blush, thinking of her torn uniform.

Dr. Fodor showed one of his luminous smiles, as his strong surgeon's fingers gently probed Ivy's hurts. "You were very foolish and headstrong to attempt what you did last night," he said. "But I would have given a great deal for the chance to do it with you!"

Then the others began to come in, and for a while there was a constant stream of visitors.

Lotta Worth was first, which meant she had stayed on after her shift had ended. Ivy said, "But what about your husband's breakfast?"

"I phoned and told him to get it himself," Lotta replied, while fussing over her. "And I'm going to look after you—"

"You are going to do no such thing! I don't need any looking after. Get out of here; scoot! I'll see you tonight."

Charlie Bell put his head in at the door. He had stayed on also. "Sure wish I had been there, with you," the orderly said. "I'd have done a lot more than yell!"

Father Mardikian, several nuns, internes and residents, the night people from Five East, a supervisor from the nursing office, two waitresses from the coffee shop—they came and went in quick succession, none staying very long. She began to realize they thought she had done something heroic, and Ivy sniffed at this; still, it was rather pleasant.

But where was Dick Rudd—?

Benita appeared, with her wide-eyed youngsters. Benita had learned of Ivy's misadventures on a morning TV news program and had rushed to St. Vibiana's. She exclaimed and wept a little, explained that her husband had not been able to get time off from his job, but sent his love. Benita and her boys stayed for half an hour.

There was a telegram from Meriel Hoad.

Flowers were being delivered, and several baskets of fruit.

There was nothing from Dick Rudd.

Sister Antonia came in, following Benita's departure, to sit beside the bed and hold Ivy's hand. "My first impulse was to give you a severe scolding," she said. "Ivy, what made you do such a thing, run such a risk, going into that neighborhood at night?"

It wasn't such a bad neighborhood, Ivy thought, only terrorized by the young hoodlums who prowled there. "Sister, I felt somebody had to do it. And I—I didn't want to involve anyone else."

"Well, I decided that a note of commendation should be entered on your record instead," Sister Antonia told her. "Then a call from his Eminence, only a few minutes ago, directed that that be done."

She was referring to the Cardinal. Ivy blushed again. "Did you tell him that I'm a sort of Protestant?"

The nun was amused. "As though that would matter in the least!"

She went on to say that the hospital would look after Jill Mowbray. Then, rising, "Ivy, don't worry about the fifth floor at night. It will be covered, if I have to handle your job myself. You must stay here for several days, and take some more time off after that. No, don't argue—!" as Ivy started to protest. "You have been through a great deal lately, and need time to recover. Is there anything at all I can do for you?"

Ivy shook her head. Benita had already called her mother. There was no one else to notify. This gave her a somewhat lonely feeling.

Dick Rudd did not need to be notified. But Dick had not appeared to see her.

Sister Antonia concluded, with a sudden twinkling smile, "I know it will be difficult, but try to be a good patient!"

After Sister Antonia there were no more visitors. Noon came and went. Ivy submitted to lunch, creamed tuna on soft toast.

More flowers were delivered, bearing the card of Dr. Paul Farrow. The room was becoming rather crowded. "Everybody is being very nice," Ivy told the aide. "But start moving some of the flowers out. Have the orderly take them to the children's wing."

Time crawled. Ivy realized she was discovering how slowly it could pass for a patient. She put on the radio earphones, but fretfully took them off again.

The aide said, "I could get you a TV set."

She did not want TV. She didn't want anything, other than the sight of Dick Rudd, the sound of his voice.

Though— If he did appear, she thought, but only for a

polite visit, polite words expressing the hope she would soon recover, this would be worse than if he did not show up at all.

And it seemed Dick was not going to bother, as the afternoon slowly waned, but toward five o'clock there was a hesitant tap on the door, it opened, and Ivy's heart leaped into her throat.

Jill Mowbray came in, to study her uncertainly. "How're you doing?" the girl asked.

"Fine, Jill. How is Cruz?"

"They said I can see him tomorrow for a few minutes, so I guess he's making out," Jill replied. She added, pride coloring her words, "I'm working, in the kitchen. Sister Antonia said they always need help there, and I'm glad to lend a hand."

"Ask for a regular job," Ivy counseled. "I'm sure it can be arranged."

"I've thought some about it," Jill confessed. "I guess it depends on Sibby, though."

"It depends on you!" Ivy said. "And so does holding him to the promise he made last night, about seeing a priest and making everything right!"

"I've thought a lot about that, too. But—Sibby will have to go to jail for a while. Maybe he'll change his mind—"

"You take Father Mardikian along when you see him," Ivy said, "and make it plain to that young man that you're holding him to his promise before he gets out of here, and will wait for him. You remind him, if he needs reminding, that he owes you a lot. Without your help last night, he would be a lot worse off than he is."

"All right," Jill Mowbray decided. "I'll do it! And I guess both of us owe you an awful lot."

"Forget that. See to it he marries you—and no more foolishness about running around with a street gang!"

"Okay," Jill said. "And I've got one more thing to say: I said some mean things to you once. I'm sorry; I take them back."

She darted out of the room.

Ivy smiled, feeling pleased. Those two had been granted a chance, at least, to make out all right.

Then she sighed, and spoke fretfully to herself, low-voiced, "You're great, just great, at fixing up other people's troubles. Why can't you do something about your own?"

Her alter ego whispered, "Well, there is a phone across the room. You can make it that far by now. Go call him."

"I can't. If he is only polite, the way he was when I called him the other day, I couldn't take it."

"I give up, then," the whisper told her. "And—you want some good advice? You ought to do the same."

"I will!" Ivy decided.

In spite of everything that had happened, her treacherous heart was still yearning for something she could not have, another chance with Dick Rudd. It was high time to stop that. Ivy set herself firmly to carry out this resolution.

The shifts changed and for a time there were a few more visitors as some of the evening personnel came to see her.

She picked at her supper. Dusk flowed into the room. Lights came on. The evening visiting period began, from seven to nine.

If Dick had the temerity to show up now she would be coolly distant with him, Ivy told herself.

It became eight o'clock, then nine and past. So that was that, she decided. He was not going to show up at all, not today or any other day—and how had he happened to be on hand last night, to subject her to this renewed ordeal, this quixotic, lingering hope which she could not disspell?

At nine-thirty a youthful R.N. came in whom Ivy did not know. She introduced herself as Miss Cochran—the English nurse who had replaced Meriel on evenings, Ivy realized, and she added cheerily, "Time to get you ready for a good night's sleep, Miss Anders!"

A grain and a half of phenobarb would probably be needed, Ivy thought morosely; she doubted that, still thinking dour thoughts of Dick Rudd, she would get any sleep without it.

The nurse continued to chatter, fluffing pillows and tightening sheets. Ivy, who recognized that she was handling her job quite competently, almost screamed at her to get out.

Then she saw Dick Rudd standing at the foot of the bed, holding a large bouquet of roses. He had appeared there so suddenly that Ivy had no time for heart flutters; the door must have been open, she thought, and he had walked right in.

Dick said, "Ivy, I have phoned half a dozen times today, every chance I could get. They claimed you were all right, but I had to see for myself."

Miss Cochran spoke severely, "Sir, visiting hours are over. You must leave, at once."

Dick Rudd ignored her. "I'm terribly sorry to be showing up so late," he continued, "but I have been tied down, on duty ever since last night."

He looked it, fatigue smudges under his eyes. Then Ivy realized how she must look to him, bruise-darkened features,

the faded touch of lipstick applied hours ago, plus the ugly hospital nightgown. If only she could have had a minute or so to prepare for his visit! But—would it have made any difference—?

Dick said, "I was ordered to take charge temporarily in this area and clean out the Flats. With those punks I arrested last night as a starting point, we have made a pretty complete haul, both Toros and Knights. I think it is going to be quiet around here for a while."

Ivy, remembering the frightened storekeeper, was glad to hear this.

He went on, jaw tightening for a moment, "I grabbed all four of those who forced you off the street; it was a temptation to use my gun on them when I saw you lying on the ground, after your head struck the curb—"

The evening nurse spoke again, "Really, you must leave!"

"No!" Ivy told her. "Dick, were—were you the one who followed me from my apartment last night, and the night before as well?"

He nodded. "I had to do it, taking up surveillance of your apartment as soon as I got off duty, trying to make sure you weren't harmed and that you reached the hospital; I was afraid for you, Ivy."

Dick showed a weary smile. "You did a god job of losing me last night, turning in at that park. It took me a little while to figure you had probably continued on to the Flats, and why. I headed there also, picked up your trail at the places where you had been, but was always a step behind you. Then I spotted your car, pulling away from that alley."

"I wish I had known it was you behind me!" Ivy said.

"Well—I didn't think you would like what I was doing, if you had known. I started to follow along again, only meaning to see you made it here. Another car trailed me for a block, then cut away. I suddenly realized it might try to head you off, so I speeded up hoping to get in front of you. Word was all over the Flats about your hunt for Cruz. It had reached the Toros. They meant to stop you, any way at all, from getting him to the hospital."

And they had almost succeeded, but Dick Rudd had been there.

He said, "The one who was going at Cruz—you held him off just long enough for me to reach your car and grab his knife."

His secret fear of being cut had not deterred him. Ivy felt a stir of pride at having had a part in that decisive action.

Dick said, "I had your car towed away. I'm afraid it is too smashed up to be repaired."

This meant she would have to get another car, with the drudgery of paying for it. Not that Ivy minded, if only last night had meant something more to Dick Rudd than the cleaning up of a minor but vexing police problem involving street hoodlums.

He had brought her in his arms to the hospital, had been concerned about her. Perhaps that meant there was still in Dick a desire or at least a willingness to try again.

But he fell silent. It was as though Dick Rudd was waiting for Ivy to speak. She fumbled for words. None seemed to come to her. The presence of the other nurse, standing disapprovingly nearby, was inhibiting. Also, there was the memory of the pain and mental torment that had resulted from knowing him, and her resolution that she was not again going to offer her heart to any man.

Dick said, "Well—" then put his flowers on a chair and started to turn away, as though about to leave.

And Ivy's resolution crumbled to nothingness in an instant. She struggled into a sitting position, gasping, "Dick, don't go!"

The rest of the words she would say were boiling in her —that if there was any chance left, any at all, she wanted it and would do whatever he demanded. Pride, ambition, a career in nursing—Ivy was ready to abandon all of these without hesitation.

If he said no . . . but at least she would have tried. She would not spend the rest of her life in haunting regret that she had not made the effort to win back this one man who, Ivy knew now, owned her heart and would always own it.

Dick had wheeled to face her again. He said, his words overriding hers, almost shouting them, "Ivy, I—I can't stand any more!"

He was coming to her, at the side of the bed, forcing Miss Cochran to step aside. Dick took her free hand in a convulsive grip.

"I tried to do as you said, tried to forget you and find myself another girl. It didn't work. It never will!" he told her. "I knew that for sure after hearing your voice on the phone the other day. And I keep remembering last night, seeing you on the ground, not knowing how badly you might be hurt, thinking there might be no chance left to prove how much I love you. Ivy, you can have your own way, your work and career, and anything else you want. Just marry me, please!"

Ivy felt blank astonishment at the surrender of this strong,

self-willed man in the moment when she had almost spoken her own capitulation to him. And she next felt an instant of temptation to smile softly and say that of course she would accept him—on her terms.

The instant passed, however, and she knew she could not do it. Ivy gave him her answer. "No, Dick," she said.

His hand jerked galvanically. Ivy refused to let it go. Lifting that hand to place it against her cheek, telling herself that she would want to be holding it, as often as she could, from now on, she added, "I will marry you, darling, as soon as they let me out of this bed. But you can't give up everything, nor can I. If each of us gives up something, though, we will find a way to—to be happy. We will work it out."

The hard-headed, unyielding Ivy Anders of their dates had refused to concede anything to him, but that Ivy Anders, thank heaven, was no longer in her. She had a sense of having been changed by all she had been through, of having gained more patience, understanding and kindness. Ivy thought she would be a better wife for Dick Rudd as a result; she hoped that she would also be a better nurse.

The straining tenseness left Dick Rudd. He began to grin as he bent, as his lips gently touched hers. "Ivy, you're wonderful," he breathed. "And you are right. We will work it out."

She returned his kiss lingeringly, quite aware that Miss Cochran, wide-eyed, was looking on. Ivy did not mind. She would not have cared if everyone in the hospital was here.

Presently she sighed. "Dick, you really must go, now."

He moved to the door, obviously walking on air, to pause there with his hand on the knob. "I'll be right here again," Dick Rudd said, "the first thing tomorrow morning!"

The door closed behind him.

Miss Cochran said, "Of all things—and on my ward—!"

But then she giggled, with a look for Ivy which contained many things—congratulations, admiration, envy, plus a wholehearted sharing of this moment which only a woman could savor, the moment when the puzzling, exasperating and often torturing business of being a female at last had meaning and purpose.

Ivy said, "When Lotta Worth comes on duty, give her a message for me, that she can start taking up her collection."

"I will," the evening nurse agreed. "And now, Miss Anders, lights and radio off."

"Yes, nurse," Ivy said.

"No more visitors!"

"Yes, nurse."

"The orders on you specify sedation, if needed."

"I don't think that will be necessary," Ivy said. Now she did not want to sleep. There was so much to think about, so many plans to make.

"It is not for you to decide," Miss Cochran told her. "After what has just happened—well, *I* would be awake for quite a while! So, we are going to put you to sleep."

Ivy sighed. But Dick would be here when she awoke tomorrow; he would be with her through all of her tomorrows, and she could think of no more wonderful thought on which to drift into deep slumber.

"Yes, nurse," Ivy Anders said happily.

Three men wanted Nurse Ivy Anders

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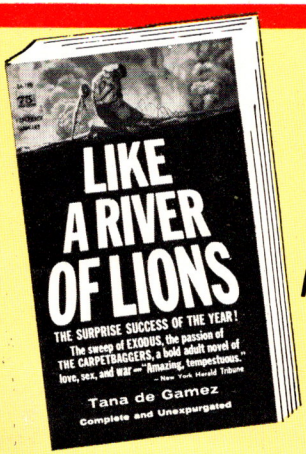
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